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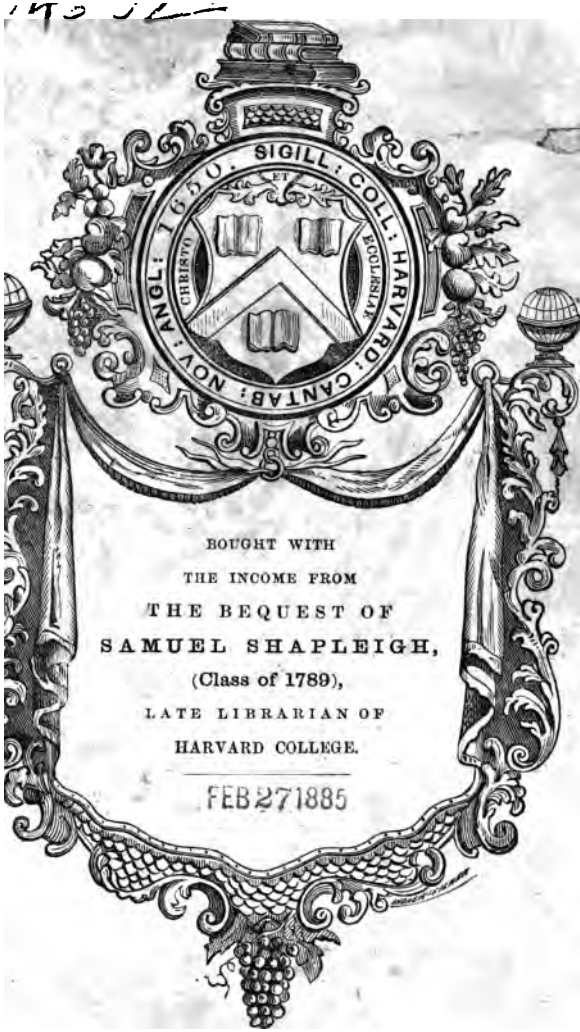

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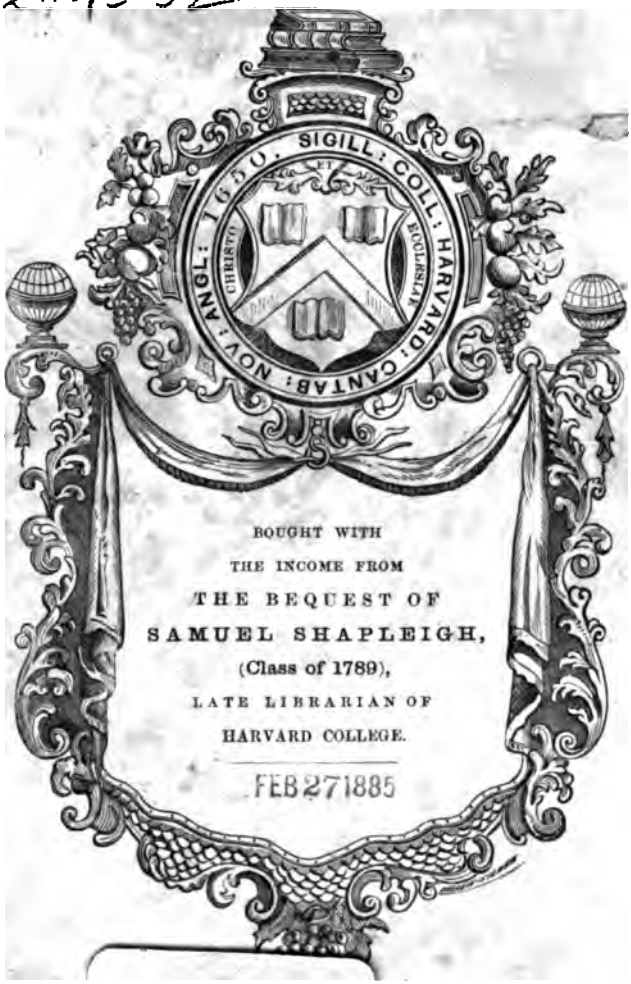

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VOL. 1031.

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TWO VOLUMES.

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BY Wilson

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Stanleigh Fund.

PREFACE.

strated in the following tale is so
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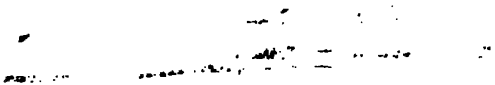
e has studiously refrained from the
nce to the facts of any individual
nade use of some of the particulars
rious published narratives of the re-
in the West of Scotland about the
as in no case attempted to pourtray
rs or stories of the actors in it—the
tale being entirely fictitious, although
nts are strictly *true*.

THE MINISTER'S WIFE.

CHAPTER I.

The Glebe Cottage at the head of Loch Diarmid was something between a primitive cottage and the little house of gentility, commonly called by that name. The hill-side of which it was the sole inhabitant had once been ecclesiastical soil belonging to the church of Lochhead, which was about a mile distant across the braes—and still, so far as this one dwelling was concerned, retained the name. It had originally been a building of one story thatched and mossy; but lately a few additional rooms had been built over one part of it, and covered with respectable slates. It was composite and characteristic, a human thing, growing out of human rules, and consequently more picturesque than if it had been the result of the most picturesque intention. The thatched end of the cottage was surrounded by no enclosure; the soft rich mossy grass of the hills broken by great bushes of heather pressed up to its very walls; while the other half, or western end, was cultivated and formed into a pretty homely garden. Hardy roses and honeysuckles, and a waving wealth of fuchsias, hanging rich with crimson bells, clothed the southern front and west end,—the refined part of the cottage. On the mountain side, there was nothing but the rough, low *whitewashed wall, the* overhanging thatch, the



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Campbell and her bairns should remain in the Glebe Cottage. Jean had few qualifications for the office of guardian to these girls, but she was in some sort a protector to them, and took care of their goods and managed their humble affairs. She was not a woman of such elevation of character as might have fitted her to take the command of the situation; but she was one of those kind and faithful souls who so often hide the sweeter qualities of their nature under an almost harsh, quite uncaressing and undemonstrative appearance. She, too, had mother-wit enough to see through the Captain, though no doubt his rank had dazzled her at first; but now that Captain Duncan was gone, she would have defended his memory to her last breath, and she was very good and tender in her own way to his daughters. She accepted her position loyally, without any attempt to better or change it.

"I've no a word to say," she said to her gossips when they attempted to bewail her grievances or stir her up to rebellion. "When I married the Captain I did it with my e'en open. They're ladies born, and no on a footing with the like of me; but they're awful good to the bairns, and Margaret is aye considerate, and I haven't a word to say."

The arrangement worked well enough, strange though it was. The sisters kept to their own end of the cottage, and Jean and her children abode in theirs. They all took their meals together in the large low-roofed kitchen; but otherwise Jean would have scorned to intrude upon her step-daughters. If they were proud in their innocent fashion of their uncertain grade of rank, the peasant woman was a thousand times prouder in her determination to keep

could be no dispute; but she did
what they had, the Captain hav-
ess; nor was she above a little
t the chances of the future. The
health was too apparent to leave
oubt; and Jean was often uneasy
to disguise the fact—as to what
erself and her children in such a

le," she said, with the plain speech
Isabel—she'll be married; and then

of Margret as if she were but like
me of her friends. "If ever there
the Lord on this earth, she's one;
ge of miracles is come back among

rd to say against Margret," said
worth than a' the rest of us counted
ther; but that'll no keep her from
rtal that looks in her face can see

the flesh," said the other; "but eh,
Ailie Macfarlane, whose days were
doctor within twenty mile but had
l now you'll see her about the loch
, as gleg and as steady as you or
spiritual-minded, but so is Margret;
e ane is worth a miracle——"

if you would but think what you're
ther speaker; "as if any child of
I'm no saying grace mightna do

it; but what's Margret but a poor sinful creature after all, like yersel?"

"And when you've said a' that can be said," said Jean, holding steadily to her argument, "it just comes to this,—that there's me and my bairns, and naething to lippen to in this world. No that I'm dounhearted. I was born to work for my bread, and I can work for theirs. But I would have liked well to give Jamie a guid education, and him the Captain's son."

"Your ain kith and kin were as good as the Captain's," said the first speaker Jenny Spence, who was "a connexion"—"your grandmother's cousin was minister of the Lewes, and a real godly man; and whether Jamie gets the siller or no, Margret's prayers are a great heritage. I would bid her think upon him when she goes up by yonder to the brae."

"I'm no saying to the contrary," said Jean; "but a scratch of her pen would do a' I want. She canna carry her siller with her; no that I'm wishing her gone—far frae that. If I could keep her, she would live to be as auld as Miss Catherine; but I canna keep her. She's failing every day; and if Providence would but put it in her head to leave a little of her siller for the callant's schooling——"

This was the stepmother's very natural desire. But in the meantime she was very kind to her husband's daughters, and cared for their goods as if they had been her own, and was a faithful servant to them. She and her children were as comfortable in their end of the cottage as were Margaret and Isabel in their half, to which by times the gentlefolks of the district would come as visitors, out of consideration for the good blood which ran in their veins by their mother's side.

It was Isabel who was the representative sister out-of-doors, and whom Miss Catherine carried with her to return calls, and make such return as was possible to the civilities of her neighbours and connexions. But it was Margaret who was the queen within and received all the homage. Day by day, however, carried the elder sister more out of the range of worldly affairs. It was, as Jean said, "a decline" that had seized her. Not a violent disease, but a soft fading. The current of her life kept shrinking into always a narrower and a narrower channel. She still went every day to a certain spot on the hill-side above the house, where a little burn went trickling from stone to stone, and a mountain-ash drooped its leafy branches over a little green knoll. For many years it had been her daily custom to sit and ponder, or to pray in this silent grassy place. It was long before she knew that any one watched her daily pilgrimage: but nothing escapes the keen inspection of a rural community. When it had just begun to be a toil to her to seek her little oratory, a poor mother from the village, who had been hanging wistfully about, accosted her with a humble petition that she would "think upon" a suffering child "when she gaed up bye to the brae." It was too late then for her to change or to hide her custom, and by degrees she became used to the petition. She went up with tremulous, feeble step day after day, bearing upon her tender soul the burden of other people's troubles, penitences, and fears. Not a soul in the parish would willingly have gone that way to disturb the saintly creature, as she knelt under her rowan-tree, with the soft burn singing in her ear, and the soft breeze blowing her hair; *and offered her offering* and made her inter-

cession. They were stern Puritans in the village below, and rampant Protestants; but they sent their white spotless virgin to intercede for them, with a faith which no doctrine could shake. The spot is marked out now from the brae, and enclosed by the reverent hands of Margaret's friends. But it was more like her when it was but the knoll of smooth mossy sward, the burn tripping from stone to stone, the tree with its long flexible branches, its summer fragrance of blossom, its autumn wealth of berries, hanging over her head. There she would sit and muse, looking with wistful eyes on the lovely landscape, which probably she neither noticed nor saw, looking into the heaven which drew near to her, with strange sweet thoughts coming and going like the angels. These thoughts went a great deal wider than the creed she had been bred in, but Margaret was not aware of that. She was a creature taught of God and not of man. Neither temptation nor turmoil of any kind ever seemed to have crossed her quiet path. Her inspiration even was not of the usual kind. Her mind and her heart were open to every one that called. No doubt her sickness had something to do with the formation of her character, but there was nothing sickly in the constitution of her mind or her thoughts.

She was stealing down softly in the slowly falling twilight, when the country was brightening into spring, six months after her father's death. She had a warm shawl wrapped closely round her shoulders, and her step was not quite steady as she left the soft grass of the hill-side for the path. It was but a few yards to the cottage, but her strength was no more than equal to the exertion. There were two people standing wait-

ing for her near the door; one of them a tall, vigorous, old lady, wrapped like herself in a large, soft, black and white shawl, who stood talking, with some eagerness, to the clergyman of the parish, a fresh, rural, middle-aged man, with clear eyes, clear complexion, and a general distinctness about him. It was Miss Catherine of the Lochhead who was speaking to the minister. Family names were unusual in the parish, for the population, with some trifling exceptions, were all Diarmids. Miss Catherine was in some respects the squire of the district. Her brother, it is true, was the real laird, but he was seldom at home, and Miss Catherine reigned in his stead. She was discussing the great topic of the moment with Mr. Lothian; and the two were not quite agreed.

"Don't speak to me about miracles," said Miss Catherine. "I'm not one of your believing kind. I don't deny that some of the things are very surprising, but they're all to be accounted for. We are surrounded by surprising things. I never lift my hand to my head, but when I think of it, it is a wonder to me—but as for direct miracles——"

"Here is Margaret," said the minister; "we'll ask her; you all believe her better than you'll ever believe me."

Margaret came up with her slightly faltering, uncertain step as he spoke; and the two gazed at her with that mingled awe and pity which a creature standing on the boundary between life and death naturally calls forth in every sympathetic soul. Mr. Lothian drew her hand through his arm as her father might have done.

"*You should not walk so far* till you get stronger,"

he said. Margaret looked at him with a smile, and shook her head.

"You know I will never get stronger," she said. "It is not like you to say what you don't mean. But you'll come in. My feet are failing already, and it's not often we see Miss Catherine here."

"My dear," said the old lady, speaking quickly as if to shake the tears out of her voice, "the horses are all busy at the plough, and I'm a poor walker. I always hear how you are all the same."

"You're vexed to look at me," said Margaret. "I know what you mean. You're like to break your heart when you see my face; but I'm not grieved for my part. I cannot see what great difference there can be between this world and the other. God is aye the same. I would like to see Isabel and know that the poor bairns are doing as they ought——"

"Oh, Margaret, do not break my heart with your bairns," cried Miss Catherine, with tears in her eyes. "It's you I'm thinking of—I care nothing for other folk."

"You would hate me if I thought that," said Margaret, with her soft smile; "and I would be very glad to have your advice. I'm troubled about Jamie's education. Isabel is young; she'll maybe not think as I do. I am very anxious for your advice."

"We were talking of different things," said Mr. Lothian, leading the invalid into the house. "We were discussing what has happened in the countryside. If anybody can convince Miss Catherine it is you, Margaret. She will not believe the story everybody is full of—though I saw Ailie with my own eyes, one day

helpless on her bed, the next walking down the hill-side far more strongly, my poor child, than you."

"It was hysterical; nothing will make me believe different," said Miss Catherine; "fanciful illness, fanciful cure. I'm not gainsaying the facts, but you'll never get me to believe it was miraculous. What is Ailie Macfarlane that God should do miracles for her? If it had been Margaret here——"

"But He knows I want no miracles," said Margaret; "I'm very content with what I get. I'm fond of both the bairns myself; but I give most to little Mary; not that she deserves it most, or that I like her best, but because her nature's aye craving. It's the same thing. Ailie craves, too, and God knows the nature He gave her; but for me—He sees I'm content."

"And you would be content if you were cut in little pieces for Isabel and Jean Campbell's weans," cried Miss Catherine, with an indignation that was assumed to hide something else. "It takes little to content you."

"Everybody is so good to me," said Margaret. "You are not so good to Ailie Macfarlane. You take up her little words, and you're angry at God for doing more for her than for me; but I take it as a compliment, for my part," said the girl, with a smile. She was so near her Father in Heaven, that she spoke of Him almost as she would have done of a father on earth.

"Well—well," said Miss Catherine, impatiently, "we must all *believe just what* you like to tell us. *Where is Isabel? I think* she might be here to look

after you and keep you comfortable instead of wandering all the day among the hills."

"She is never away from me," said Margaret, warmly; "she would carry me in her arms if I would let her. I sent her out for change, poor Bell! It would be a hard thing if I was to let her put all her happiness on me."

"Better on you than on that English lad," said Miss Catherine, with heat, "that nobody knows. In my day, we were never allowed to speak to a young man till his kith and kin were known. You think you're wiser now—but I wish it may come to no harm," said the old lady. She was an old woman given to opposition, but the strength of her indignation now lay in the absolute necessity she felt to do or say something which should not drop into weak lamentation and tears.

Margaret made no answer. She bent back in her invalid chair, and threw off the shawl which wrapped her, and untied the bonnet which surrounded her delicate face like a great projecting frame. As for the minister, his face flushed, and his hands grew restless with agitation; though on the surface of things it would have seemed that he had very little to do with the matter.

"There is no meaning in it," said Mr. Lothian; "they're children both;—she is not the one, especially now—No, you need not think of that."

And with this speech he rose up and went to the window, and gazed out, not knowing what to say. Miss Catherine held up her hands commenting on his excitement as women do,—half contemptuous, half *amused,*—

that might be her father?" she
garet, in a whisper. And Mar-
ndulgent quiet of old age.
' said, softly; "God will guide
ot afraid for my Isabel. When
what is in her. My shadow is
you don't think it, between her

' minister turned round, as with
l interrupted the side-talk.
of her, here comes Isabel," he
h. Both the women knew at
an if he had said it, that the
Stapylton, the one idler of the
Isabel. As the young pair ap-
tors prepared to go away. Miss
d in her anxiety and grief for
lings stirred in the mind of her
ager to leave the cottage before
should appear, and hurried the
aking.
her out," he said, pressing Mar-
rtain petulant haste, which she
true he was old enough to be
a that reflection, though he had
in his own thoughts, had not
; to have done. He could not
nodded his head with a poor as-
s, and hurried Miss Catherine
h. Even Mr. Lothian's secret
covered, like other things, by
he old lady perceived what he
ear in her eye, and looked at

him with a certain grim, half-pitying smile about the corner of her mouth.

"Isabel will think we are angry," she said, watching him with a certain interest—almost amusement in his suffering; "though, poor thing, I don't know that she is to blame."

"Why should we be angry?" said the poor minister, winding himself up to what he supposed to be an air of perfect composure. "I never thought she was to blame."

"We cannot expect much wisdom from a young thing of her age," said Miss Catherine. She was full of the natural amazement of women at the ever curious phenomena of a passion so out of date; and there was a tone of kindly contempt, as well as amusement, in her voice.

"Margaret is no older," he said with a sigh.

Upon which his companion burst into a short, agitated laugh.

"Minister, you'll excuse me," she said; "but the sight of a man like you taking note of the nonsense of a lassie like her—That I should laugh when I have but just left that bonnie creature with Death in her face. Talk of bonnie Isabel and her silly ways, when we have but left *her*."

Mr. Lothian made no answer. No man could have been more kind to Margaret; but bonnie Isabel and her silly ways disturbed the good man more than anything else in earth or heaven.

"Why should she die?" said Miss Catherine, with sudden agitation. "Tell me that, you that are a minister of God. She is worth ten of us common folk. It is

good to see her—good to be near her—and yet it is her that has to die."

"It is because she is the most fit for heaven," said the clergyman, solemnised by this appeal.

"That's what you all say," said Miss Catherine, with a touch of contempt; "but I cannot even take that for gospel. There is old Nancy Sinclair at the clachan as ready as any; but not for her do your chariots come. I cannot understand God for my part," the hot-tempered old woman said with hasty tears. God seemed to have come strangely near to the Loch, and was spoken of with a certain realism as a present and vividly realized personage, which to stranger ears might seem profane.

"Her mother was just the same," Miss Catherine continued, pouring out her grievances against the supreme Governor of all things, with a petulance nearly related to tears, "taken away when there was the most for her to do, and leaving these two poor things to guide each other. If she had been spared, Margaret might have been a blooming lass at this day, and Isabel not left to wander at her will, and pick up friends, and prepare, maybe, her own destruction."

"Miss Catherine, you forget that an innocent girl should not be spoken of so," said the minister, with again a heavy sigh.

"I forget nothing, Edward Lothian—nor that you, like an old fool, are breaking your heart about her; a girl that might be your daughter—a mere silly bairn!"

"Hush!" he said. A faint colour had crept upon his face. He made no attempt to deny the accusation. "I hope I am not a man to break my heart, as you say, *for anything in the world*," he added, after a pause,

"as long as there is the parish, and my work;" and the poor man unconsciously once more rounded his sentence with a sigh.

CHAPTER II.

THE code of manners in a rural district like that of Loch Diarmid, and in the doubtful rank, half gentry half "common folk," held by the two sisters, is less severe than on higher altitudes and more formal scenes. Though Isabel might blush a little to be seen by Miss Catherine walking down the hill with Horace Stapylton, it was not because any idea of impropriety occurred to her. She had met him "by accident," and he had joined her in her walk and returned with her, to ask for her sister in the most natural and entirely fortuitous way. And the country girl was unaware even that the presence of a chaperone was unnecessary to justify such companionship. It was almost twilight when they entered the little parlour where Margaret lay back wearily in her chair, longing for rest and the silence of the night; but she smiled softly at her sister, and half rose from her seat, weak, but courteous to acknowledge the presence of the stranger.. Stapylton was the son of an English squire, who had been sent to Scotland to study agriculture, and from the high farming of Lothian had found his way to Ayrshire on the score of cheesemaking, and thence to the other side of the Loch to Mr. Smeaton's great stock farm. It had been autumn when he came, and the grouse was a still more potent attraction. And after a while he had found his way over the braes to

see Mr. Lothian, who had once been tutor to the young earl (before he came to be marquis), and had many English friends. A Scotch Manse is the home of hospitality, and young Stapylton found himself comfortable and saw Isabel, and discovered many attractions in the place; and, after a succession of flying visits, had settled down as Mr. Lothian's permanent guest. In the primitive world of Loch Diarmid he was distinguished by his nationality, which placed him on a little pedestal apart from all competitors. He was "yon English lad" to the prejudiced multitude; and more kindly bystanders entitled him "the young Englishman at the Manse." He was a ruddy, well-looking, not highly refined type of man; but he was a stranger and "English," and surrounded with a certain agreeable half-mystery in consequence. His accent had a sound of refinement and elevation in it to ears used to the broader vowels and "Westcountry drawl" of the vernacular. And to Isabel Diarmid he had a charm more subtle even than the attraction of singularity and unlikeness to the multitude. He was the first man who had openly and evidently owned her power as a woman, which of itself is a great matter. He had been the first to awaken in her mind that delicious sense of sovereignty which surprises the child into womanhood and awakens all the budding faculties. There might be truer and deeper love to come, but that first thrill of wondering delight had come to the girl out of young Stapylton's homage. Since he had come to live at the Manse the idle young fellow had thrown himself continually in Isabel's way. She could not go "down the road" on the simplest errand *without meeting him.* If she wandered over the

to turn to that solemn prospect from her own natural, simple joyfulness; and yet it was good to escape from the sad spectacle of her sister's waning days by means of that vague possibility, half-comforting, half-appalling. If it should be so—if the world which was so sweet should melt away, and all be lost in that splendour of "His" coming, which to Isabel herself, for the moment, looked more awful than consolatory—then, at least, Margaret would be exalted as she deserved. There was some compensation in that.

"As if He did not know you better than I do!" said Margaret, with a smile; "as if He had not an eye to see that the bit silly thing was right in her heart, though her feet went whiles astray like a bairn's! I am fond of my Isabel, but no so kind as He is; He's not blaming you for liking the bonnie hills and the sweet air—though maybe I was blaming you a little in my heart. That makes all the difference. And the fools are feared for Him seeing!" cried Margaret with a smile, half of indignation, half of pride. The daylight had almost gone by this time, and her breath was short; she said a little sentence, and then paused, making clear stops in her weakness, and giving a simple emphasis unawares. As for Stapylton, he had hidden himself among the shadows, somewhat appalled by this kind of conversation, while Isabel sat low by her sister's knees, and gazed up with her bright lamps of eyes. Outside a little glimmer of pale light showed where the loch reflected the pale heavens, and down by the waterside the people were praying in an unanimous strange fervour—praying not for daily bread and common gifts, but for miracles, wonders, the coming of Christ, the end of all things.

It was not wonderful if the heart of the young saint swelled within her, or that the sweet, half-developed nature of Isabel should have thrilled with a strange mingling of fears and hopes. The young fellow who sat by gazed at them with dull wonder. He did not make it out. He was not of the parish, and thought the prevailing excitement must be madness or feigning, as an unsympathetic stranger, in the presence of a strong sentiment which he does not understand, is so apt to do. A certain rustling which he made in his uneasiness caught Isabel's ear, and made her aware of the foreign element which was out of harmony. Her own feeling on the subject was no more than sympathy, and she was the more quickly affected by this silent protestation. She rose hastily, feeling by intuition what was passing in her lover's mind. Never could there have been a more comprehensive embodiment and contrast of feeling. Isabel rushed into common life with a bound; half in yearning to recover her interrupted relations with him, half with a proud reluctance to lay open to his cold eye the inner life which he misconceived or laughed at.

"*She's* coming in from the Loch-head," cried Isabel, "and the bairns are ready for their supper—and, Margaret, we've wearied you."

She was Jean Campbell, the stepmother to whom Isabel was less kind and tolerant than her sister, and whom presently they heard come in with a little commotion into the large low kitchen where the family took its meals. Little Mary had been with her mother, and by-and-by a little knock at the parlour-door announced her approach. The lady-visitors were very *great people to the child,* and only she of "the other

family" ever ventured uninvited into that splendid apartment. She was like Isabel, though Isabel was indignant to be told so—with two large excitable, brilliant brown eyes, which at this moment blazed out of the little flushed and agitated face. She had been at the meeting, and had heard all, and felt all, with precocious sensibility. While Isabel went out under pretence of helping her stepmother, but in reality to accompany her visitor to the door, the child knelt down on the stool she had been sitting on by Margaret's side, and began her little passionate tale.

"It was like in the Bible," said little Mary; "in the middle of the reading the Holy Spirit came. O Margaret, I couldn't bear it! Ailie gave a great cry, and then she spoke; but it wasna *her* that spoke: her countenance was shining white, like the light—just like the Bible; and she spoke out like a minister, but far better than the minister. It was awfu' to hear her; and, O Margaret, I couldn't bear it; I thought shame."

"Why did you think shame?" said Margaret. "You should have been glad to hear, thankful to hear—even if it was too high for a bairn like you to understand."

"It wasna that," cried the child. "I thought shame that it wasna you. Why can Ailie do it, and no you? And they say you are as good as Ailie, and as holy; but they say you havena faith. O Margaret, would you let *her* aye be the first, and a' the folk going after her? I canna bear it! I have faith mysel. You could get up this minute, and go and speak like Ailie, if you would but have faith."

Margaret put her arm softly round the excited

child, and the little thing's agitation found vent in tears. She put down her head on her sister's shoulder, and sobbed with childish mortification and wounded pride. Whether any echo of that cry woke in the patient soul thus strangely reproached, the angels only know. Margaret said nothing for some minutes; she held the child close with her feeble arm, and calmed and soothed her; and it was only when the sobs were over and the excitement subdued that she spoke.

"So you think God's no so kind to me?" she said softly in the darkness. "My little Mary, you are too little to understand. I am not one that craves for gifts; I am content with love. I am best pleased as it is. Ailie and me are two different spirits; not that one is better and the other worse. If we had both been angels, we would still have been different. You are too little to understand. I am not the one to speak and to work; I am the one to be content."

"But you shouldna be content," said little Mary; "you should have faith. O Margaret, I'm little, but I've faith. Rise up, and be well and live! They a' say that to be ill and die is a sin against the Holy Ghost."

The child had risen up in her excitement, and stood stretching out her little arms over her sister. The room was dark and still, with but the "glimmering square" of the window fully visible, and night gathering in all the corners. Margaret's form was invisible in the soft gloom; the outline of her reclining figure, the little phantom standing over her, the suggestion of a contrast, intense as anything in life, was all that could have been divined by any spectator. Presently *soft hands stretched* upwards, and took hold

of the little rigid arms of the would-be marvel-worker; and a voice still softer,—low like the coo of a dove, came out of the darkness.

Margaret attempted no reply; she made no remonstrance; she only repeated that psalm which is as the voice of its mother to every Scottish child—the first thing learnt, the last forgotten:—

"The Lord's my Shepherd, I'll not want,
He makes me down to lie
In pastures green; he leadeth me
The quiet waters by.

Yea, though I walk in death's dark vale,
Yet will I fear none ill;
For thou art with me, and thy rod
And staff me comfort still."

As the soft familiar voice went on, poor little Mary's excited nerves broke down. She burst once more into tears, and ere the psalm was ended added her small faltering voice to the low and steady tones of her sister. She was overcome by influences much too exciting to be understood by a child. The little creature yielded, because her physical endurance was not equal to the task she had set herself, but her mind was unchanged. She was impatient, angry, and mortified. Her sister's rival had triumphed, and little Mary could not bear it. As for Margaret, she rose when her psalm was ended, and took her little sister's hand and led her into the kitchen, where the family table was prepared. The change was quaint and strange, as were all the contrasts in this family. The kitchen was large and low, with a door opening directly upon the road, and two broad square lattice windows, one of which looked out upon the moor. There was a great wooden table in the centre, with three chairs,

and a couple of three-legged stools set round it. Jean Campbell—buxom and comely in her widow's cap—was filling the children's bowls with porridge, while Isabel made tea. The fireplace was large, but not old enough to be picturesque, and the room was lighted by a little oil-lamp fastened to the high wooden mantel-shelf, on which were ranged all the shining things possessed by the household, in the shape of brass candlesticks, and other domestic ornaments. This dim light was supplemented by what lingering remains there were of twilight from the open door. Twilight, indeed, was all that was within. The floor was tiled and red, the walls dark with smoke and age. A kind of cupboard in one corner disclosed the press-bed which belonged to the cottage originally, but which the little winding ladder-like staircase at the other side made unnecessary. The two unlighted candles, standing white and tall on the dresser ready to be taken into the parlour; the pretty china cups and teapot at one end of the large table, and still more the appearance of the two sisters, gave the most curious climax to the confusion of ideas which seemed to belong to the place. Margaret sat down in the cushioned chair which awaited her, still holding little Mary by the hand. She had to pause to take breath before she spoke, and the child stood by her like an eager little prisoner, with her big eyes shining. Mary's mind was precocious, and stimulated into premature action by the strange circumstances that surrounded her. She felt as profoundly as if she had been twenty, that while Margaret and Isabel were the Miss Diarmids, she was only "Jean Campbell's *bairn;*" and now a sure way *of obtaining individual distinction*, the highest of all

grades of rank, had burst upon the child; therefore she was in no mood for the half-reproof which she foresaw was to come.

"I think little Mary is too young for the meetings," said Margaret; "not that I mean she should not learn; but she is very quick and easy moved, and she is but a bairn."

The stepmother looked up with a little flash of not unnatural suspicion.

"She is no a lady born like you," said Jean, hastily; "but in my way of thinking that's a reason the more why she should learn."

"But no when she is so young," said Margaret. "Her little face is all moving, and the bairn herself trembling. It's her nerves I'm thinking of," said the sick girl, with a deprecating smile; at which, however, Jean only shook her head, as she looked at the child's glowing, startled face.

"Nerves! I never heard of nerves in her kith or kin," said the woman; and then added, "You may speak to Isabel about nerves, Margaret; she's been greeting but the house like an infant, and tells me "naething," when I asks what ails her. It's to her you should speak."

Margaret looked at her sister across the table, and shook her head. "You all take your own way," she said, with a touch of sadness, "though you say it is to please me. I am thankful beyond measure that you care for the kirk and for prayer, but little Mary might be as well if she was left with me. We are great friends. And, Isabel, you'll make your bonni eyes red, but you'll no give up a hard thought or hasty word; and yet that would be worth more tha

miracles. Jamie, come and tell me what has happened to-day on the hill."

"Me!" said Jamie, looking up with his mouth full of porridge, and his eyes large with wonder. "There's never naething happens till me."

"Is that a way to answer when Margaret speaks to you?" cried his mother. "But he'll never learn manners—never, whatever you do. I think whiles he's no better than a natural born."

"But he knows every creature on the hill, and every bird on the trees," said Margaret, "and is never cruel to one of them. That's grand manners. He's good to everything God has made. Jamie, did you see the minister to-day?"

"Hunting flowers on the hill," said Jamie promptly, thrusting away his thick matted white hair from his round, staring, wondering eyes. He was like his mother—that was all that could be said of him. He had nothing of little Mary's resemblance to her step-sisters, nor had he the good looks of his soldier father; and, notwithstanding his mother's anxiety to give him an education, that greatest of prizes in the estimation of a Scotch peasant, he was slow of comprehension, and slow of speech, an unpromising subject. Jean broke in at his words with a little snort of indignation.

"So mony great things going on at his very side, and him gathering a wheen useless flowers! And it was well seen on him," she cried; "there was Mr. Fraser of the Langholm and Mr. Wood on the other side of the hill, that took it a' upon themselves; though Ailie's in our parish, and a' the stir. And our ain *minister without a word to say!* I've aye said he was

ower much taken up with his flowers, and his fancies; no, but what I think it would be a far better thing for Isabel——"

"Nothing about me, if you please," said Isabel, flashing into sudden wrath; and then she gave Margaret a guilty look. As for Margaret she but shook her head softly once more.

"He is not so sure in his own mind," she said, "that is what makes him silent. Mr. Wood and Mr. Fraser are different kind of men. Some can just believe without more ado, and some have to think first. Isabel, if you're ready, it is the bairns' bedtime, and we can go."

"You're awfu' anxious to-night about the bairns," said Jean, still irritable and displeased.

"She is so little," said Margaret, stooping over little Mary to kiss her. "If you would but believe me, and no take her down yonder. How can she understand at her age? and she has nerves as well as Isabel. Will you promise me not to think to-night? but just to fall asleep, little Mary, as soon as you've said your prayers?"

"I'll pray for you, Margaret," cried the child, with the tremulous tones of excitement, "and you'll, maybe, be well and strong like Ailie the morn's morn."

"Then wait till morning comes," said Margaret, "for to-night I am wearied, and I want to rest."

Thus they separated, the sisters with their candles retiring to their little parlour,—the lights in the window of which were watched by more than one watcher from far, with tender thoughts of the young inmates. But Margaret was weary,—too weary,—for the counsel she had to give. She went to bed leaving Isabel, the

latest of all the house, sitting alone, in a fever of thought which she could now indulge for the first time. The lonely little window sent a feeble ray upon the hill-side road, and was visible on the loch to such a late hour as seldom witnessed any window alight in Loch Diarmid. There were many causes for the tumult of fancies which absorbed the girl and made her forget the progress of time. The very air around her was full of excitement; her sister for anything she knew might the next day rise healed from her bed. She herself might be free as the winds to choose her own life; and it was at the very climax and crisis of this life that Isabel stood.

CHAPTER III.

It will have been guessed by what has been already said that one of the periodical fits of religious excitement to which every primitive country is liable, had lately taken place in the parish of Loch Diarmid. There had been a general quickening of popular interest in religious matters. The doctrinal side, which is generally uppermost in Scotland, had given way to the emotional; and a great many subjects, long laid aside as antiquities, and belonging to a different dispensation, reappeared, and were discussed in eager peasant assemblies as possible occurrences of every day. The questions which were hotly debated in every cottage were, whether the age of miracles had passed away—whether they were not, on the contrary, a necessary adjunct of Christ's Church in all ages—whether *sickness and suffering* of every kind were not

so many contradictions of God's will and evidences of want of faith. Religion had taken a new meaning to the fervid primitive mind. A miraculous world, all glowing with undeveloped forces, rose up around them. The end might be that the Lord would come, bringing confusion to His enemies and triumph to His people, or, at least, that such supernatural endowments would come as should make poor men and peasant maidens the reformers of the world. At the first outset there was something splendid, something exalting, in this hope. And the strange story which a short time before had run round the Loch as by magic gave it instant confirmation. Ailie Macfarlane, a young woman known to be hopelessly ill, who had been visited, and sympathized with, and ministered to by all the kindly gossips of the parish,—whose parents had been condoled with on her approaching loss,—and whose symptoms were as well known to the community as their several and individual sufferings, had risen up all at once from her sick bed and gone out on a journey at the call of faith. The astonished parish had suddenly encountered her afoot upon its public roads, yet knew with a certainty beyond all power of deception, that the day before she had been a helpless sufferer.

Such a wonder had an immense effect upon the popular mind, as indeed a thoroughly ascertained fact of the kind would have had anywhere. Whether there was any strictly physical explanation of so wonderful a recovery, I cannot tell; but the fact was indisputable, vouched for not by two or three witnesses, but by the entire community. Whether or not she might turn out a prophetess, as she claimed to be, this wonderful

preliminary was certain. She had risen up and walked like the paralytic in the Gospel, in defiance of all physicians and human means of cure, and was visible among them in restored health and activity a creature who had been on the verge of the grave. Throughout the whole country, great and small, without exception, were occupied by Ailie Macfarlane's wonderful recovery. Nobody could deny, and nobody could explain it. There was not a house in the district where sickness was which did not thrill with a strange hope. For once in this limited local world most men succeeded in realising, as by a gleam of sudden enlightenment, that the spiritual life was at least as important as the temporal, and that their relations with God were of more instant moment and present value to them than their relations with men. To bring this conviction into the minds of an ordinary population, however temporally, however superficially, with the force of reality, was of itself no small wonder; and it was very much the work of the two young women who filled so strange a place in the sober Scotch parish,—Ailie Macfarlane, on whom the miracle had been wrought, and Margaret Diarmid, the subject of no miracle, whose power was that of pure holiness and Christianity alone.

The thrill of strange expectation which thus ran through the parish was, as may be supposed, more strongly felt by Margaret's friends than by any other of the rustic neighbours. The strength of their love for her tempted them almost to accuse, and certainly to reproach, the wilful sufferer who would not avail herself of her known favour with Heaven and be healed like the other. It was this certainty that set her *sister free (or at least, so she* thought,) to entertain

visions of happiness to herself independent of Margaret. On the very next evening, when the sun had set upon the loch, but still lingered red upon the further hills, Isabel resumed the subject which had occupied her thoughts. The day had come between, with all its commonplace occupations, and the night with its sleep, and it was under very different circumstances that the subject so important to the girl's happiness was approached. Notwithstanding her numberless little employments it had never been out of her mind all day. She had held long and serious conversation, with Margaret. She had taught little Mary her lessons; she had taken a share in everything, even in the talk, when poor Mr. Lothian, the minister, had paid his almost daily visit. But throughout all, like an accompaniment, her controversy with herself had gone on all day, taking up every spare moment, and holding a tenacious life through all obstacles. Could she do it? Sunder her future life from her past at a leap—set herself free from all the present claims upon her—could it be possible to do it? or, on the other hand, would she, could she give up her love?

Isabel's brain had grown giddy by dint of thinking,—when suddenly she heard a little gravel thrown on the corner of the parlour window—the signal that she was waited for without. She threw her shawl round her hastily, drawing it over her head, and stole out. Margaret was not there to be disturbed. She had gone to her place of prayer some time before, and was still in that silent nook, with the sweet rowan-tree blossoms scenting the air round her. Isabel stole out with a certain guilty sense that her errand was not one to be approved by any beholder. Some way up,

beyond the cottage, among the great bushes of whins and heather, lingered a single figure. Few passengers cared to wade among that thick undergrowth; here and there it was treacherous moss in which the foot sank; here and there a young birch waved its brown locks pathetically in the evening breeze; and the heather-bushes, with their gnarled stalks like miniature oaks, were not very pleasant to walk among. But the two who had appointed their meeting there did not care for the heather stalks, or the trembling moss. Neither did they care for the landscape—the hills still glorified with red gleams of sunshine, with Loch Goil leaden-blue at their feet on one side, and Loch Diarmid silvery grey on the other. They were thinking but of themselves—or, rather, as they would have said, of each other. Earth had not anything to show more fair to the young man than the pretty figure all wrapt in that shawl, with bright, brown, dewy eyes looking out from its shade, and a quiver of emotion about those soft lips, who wound her way through the heather to meet him. He did not feel as she did, that the meeting was wrong,—but at least it was forbidden, if not by any one in words, still by every one of those principles of duty and prudence against which a young man delights to set himself. It was treachery to those who loved the two best on either side; it was madness in every prudential point of view. But, at the same time, it was love; and what more could be said?

"Have you thought it all over?" said the young man, eagerly. "Isabel, you cannot mean to cast me off. Don't tell me so; don't look as if you could be so cruel. I could bear anything for your sake, but that *I could not bear.*"

This was said in haste and excitement, after a long pause; for Isabel had nothing to say to her lover, but went on with him in silence, turning her face away from his anxious looks.

"I never thought of casting you off," said Isabel; "how could that be? If we were to be parted for ever and ever, I could never cast you off; but I canna do it, Horace,—I canna do it. You must ask me no more."

"Why cannot you do it?" he said. "What is to prevent you? I have told you everything, Isabel. They will say I am too young to marry if I ask them at home—and they don't know you. If my mother knew my Isabel, it would be different. And if we were but married, it would be different. Once married, everything would come right. And what matter is it if we were married in private or in public? It is always in a house here in Scotland. I only ask that one little sacrifice. Is it much to ask when I am ready to do anything—everything——"

"But there is nothing for you to do," said Isabel; "it would all be me. You are making me deceive them now. I never said what was not true all my life before; and now I'm false to everybody—everybody but you."

"It would put an end to that if you would do what I say," cried the young man. "We should go away; and then when we came back, everybody would know. I am asking so little—only to have it done privately. We would come back, and all would be right. My people would make up their minds to it when they could not help it; and yours——"

"Ah!" cried Isabel, "to speak to me of running

away and being married, and my Margaret—my only sister, lying dying! How can you name such a thing to me?"

"Now, Isabel," said young Stapylton, "this is nonsense, you know. If you break my heart, what good will that do to her? It will not cure her. Besides," he added, with suppressed scorn, "you know yourself—you have told me—that Margaret might be well if she liked. She is very good, isn't she? better than that girl whom you are all talking of—and she ought to be cured. If she keeps herself ill on purpose, it is cruel and selfish of her. Why should she spoil your life and her own too?"

"How dare you speak like that of my sister?" said Isabel, with blazing eyes, "and her so near the angels? Oh, Horace, you would never think *so* of Margaret, if you were really, really caring for me."

"If you can doubt me, I have no more to say," said the young man; and then they started apart, and the briefest lovers' quarrel ensued—a quarrel soon made up in the inevitable, universal way, strengthening the position of the one who attacked, and weakening that of the defender. Stapylton drew Isabel's hand through his arm when she gave it him in reconciliation and led her through the heather farther and farther from home. "You are never to utter such cruel words any more," he said, "nor so much as to think them. Am not I ready to give up everything for you? The old Hall, and my father's favour, and all I might have if I pleased. It is different from Loch Diarmid, Isabel; but I care for nothing but you; and you will not make the least little sacrifice for me."

"*I would make any sacrifice*—any sacrifice; there

is nothing so hard but I would try to do it—for you, Horace," said the girl with tears.

"And yet you will not come away with me for two or three days, and be made my wife! What are you afraid of, Isabel? Can you not trust me? Do you think I would harm you? Tell me what it is you fear?"

"Fear!" said Isabel surprised, lifting her eyes to his face. "When you are with me what can I fear?"

"Then why don't you trust me?" said the young fellow, with a sudden flush on his face.

"I trust you as I trust myself," said Isabel. "Could I care for any one as I care for you, and not trust him? It is my own folk I am thinking of. I cannot deceive my own folk. Oh, dinna ask me, Horace, and I will do anything else in the world."

"Your own folk!" said Horace, with a little contempt; "Jean Campbell, perhaps, that is not good enough to be your housekeeper. I am deceiving father and mother for you, Isabel, and I never grumble. To think of your father's widow in comparison with me!"

"I think of Margaret," said Isabel, "my twin sister. Oh, never ask me more! It would kill my Margaret. Me to deceive her that has been part of herself. Oh, Horace, dinna ask me! I would die to please you; but not even to please you, would I hurt her. I canna do it. I would sooner die!"

Young Stapylton's face grew red all over with a passionate, furious colour; then he drew his breath hard and restrained himself. For one moment he grasped Isabel's hand, which rested on his arm, with a firm pressure, which would have made her scream had

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After a long interval a "No" dropped from her lips. "No," she went on, shaking her head slowly, "I must not think of you first,—not now. I must think of Margaret first. Dinna be angry, Horace. It is but a year since I saw you first, and she has been my best friend and my dearest for twenty years. And you are well and strong, and she is dying; and you have plenty of friends, and she has no one but me. I must think of her before you."

"Then you don't love me!" cried the young man. "I see how it is: you have a liking for me,—that is all. You are pleased to keep a man dangling about at your orders, waiting for you, as they say here, at kirk and market; but as for *loving*—giving up all and following your husband,—you're not the girl for that, Isabel. I see: you're Scotch, and you're cautious; and you won't take one step till you see what is to be the next; and as for speaking of love——"

Isabel looked up at him hastily with indignant, tender eyes, wounded to the heart. She drew her hand out from his arm. Not love him, and yet deceive her friends for him and leave Margaret alone the long, slow evening through! The colour rose violent and hot to her face. But she was very proud as well as very warm in her affections. She would not explain. Turning away from him as she disengaged her hand, her eye suddenly caught the dreary blank of the moor around them, from which the light had faded. Never before in all their rambles had they wandered so far. The cottage was invisible, as well as every other habitation. The night was falling. It was time already for the family supper, and Margaret, all alone, would be waiting for her sister, while Isabel was far from

home, in the dark on the moor, with only her lover beside her. A little cry of consternation burst from the girl's lips. Had she had wings, she could scarcely have gone back quick enough to save Margaret from anxiety and wonder, and perhaps fear. Her companion saw her start, her painful surprise, and forgot his upbraiding. He seized her hand again suddenly, and drew it almost with a degree of force within his arm.

"Isabel," he cried energetically, "it's night, and nobody will see us; and we are as near to Loch Goil as we are to the Glebe—I think nearer, Isabel. It's but to go on, now you are so far on your way. There shall be nothing to worry, nothing to frighten you. Let us go down on the other side, and get it over. It is not a great matter, if you love me. Margaret will be anxious, but we'll send her word to-morrow. I know a good woman to take you to. I know a quiet way down, where nobody will see us. Isabel, Isabel! you don't mean to say you're angry. You are not afraid of me?"

"I'm feared for no man," cried Isabel, drawing herself away from him, and turning back with startled, gleaming eyes. She made no further answer, but folded her shawl close round her, and turned her back upon her eager, pleading lover. He had to follow her as she made her way with nervous haste back to the highroad which crossed the hill. Even then he did not think his cause lost. The night was growing dark, and he had brought her far from home, and the road led both ways. He went after her, entreating, praying, using every art he knew.

"They will be as anxious now as they can be," he said; "*they will think we have* gone; they will be

better pleased to see you come back to-morrow my wife than to have all the parish telling that you and I were here so long on the hill. Isabel, it will be all to do over again, anxiety and everything. The worst is over. Come; an hour's walk will bring us to Loch Goil."

He put his hand on her arm as he spoke. They were on the verge of the highroad, which by this time was scarcely distinguishable from the moor. He had followed closely across the heather, as she sped along, keeping by her side, urging his anxious arguments. Now, for the first time, he put out his hand, drawing her closer to him, drawing her the other way, on the downward path which led to another life. Isabel snatched herself away and stood facing him for a moment. It was a moment of breathless suspense to both. He knew her so little that he believed she might still decide for him; and held his breath in expectation: while the indignant, proud, tender creature stood looking at him, uncertain whether she should part with him for ever, or throw herself into his arms in a momentary storm of love and upbraiding, making him understand at once and for ever the possibilities and impossibilities in her nature. She stood lingering for that moment of doubt—and then she turned suddenly from him without a word, and drew her shawl over her head and fled homewards like a deer or a child of the hills. He had thought she might turn with him, might give up her fate into his hands, at the very moment when she turned thus and flew forward into the darkness, leaving him without a word of explanation. While he stood still in consternation he *heard her rapid* feet scattering the pebbles on the

road, going as fast as a mountain-stream. The young man made a plunge after her; but she was already far in advance, and had known the path all her life, and there was neither credit nor advantage in pursuing a runaway maiden. He came to a dead pause and ground his teeth in vexation and disappointment. He was passionately "in love" with the girl, and yet he called her names in the bitterness of his mortified feelings. "I'll have her yet, all the same, whether she will or no," he said with fury, as he found himself thus left in the lurch. As for Isabel, she took no time to think. She knew every step of the road along which she rushed in the darkness. Her heart was hot and burned within her; if it was anger, if it was excitement, if it was misery, she had no time to decide. The only thing before her was to get home. If she could but reach home, and find Margaret tranquil, as was her wont, then the whole matter should be ended for ever. This was what Isabel was thinking, so far as she could be said to think at all.

When she came at last within sight of the dim light in the kitchen window, a low lattice, out of which the lamp was faintly shining like a glowworm on the ground, Isabel's flying pace was quickened. She could distinguish already some vague outlines of more than one figure round the door. Had the occasion or her feelings been less urgent, she would have paused to recover her breath, to put back her shawl, and end her precipitate course with an attempt at decorum; but she was too much agitated now to think of any such precautions. They heard her rapid feet as she began to hear the soft sound of their voices in the summer gloom; and Jean Campbell had but time to

call out, "Who goes there? is it oor Isabel?"—when the girl rushed into the midst of them, breathless, her hair ruffled by the shawl, her face glowing with the unusual exercise, her eyes shining. She rushed into the midst of the little group, catching hold of her stepmother in her agitation to stop herself in her headlong course. And the watchers started and gave place to her with a mixture of joy and terror.

"Lassie, you'll have me down!" cried Jean Campbell, staggering under the sudden clutch, "but it's you, God be praised. Here's your sister half out of her mind. And where have you been?"

"Is Margaret there?" cried the panting Isabel. "And it so late, and the dew falling—and all my fault! But I did not mean it—I never thought it was so late; and then we got astray on the hill; and I've run every step of the way," cried Isabel hastily. She was safe; and unawares, against her will, her lips began to seek excuses. After all, it was nothing very wicked. And, perhaps, it was not necessary to tell of young Stapylton and his foolish proposal. Perhaps he was toiling down after her in the dark, not knowing his way, with a mortified, wounded heart. All this flashed into her mind in an instant. "The heather and the moss are so confusing," said Isabel, still breathless with her flight; "but as soon as my feet found the road, I've run every step of the way."

"And what were you doing among the moss and the heather?" began the stepmother. Margaret interrupted the expostulation. She put her hand out in the *darkness to* her sister. "I am not able to stand longer —*now Isabel's* come," she said; "I am wearied and

faint with waiting—say nothing to-night—the morn will be a new day."

"Ay," said Jean Campbell to herself, when the sisters had gone in; "the morn's aye a new day; but them that's lightheaded and thoughtless the night will be thoughtless the morn. I wish a night could change a'—or a year—or anything but God's grace—no but what God's grace is ready for them that ask it," she added, with compunction. Jean was but half influenced by the prevailing passion, and the fact that Ailie Macfarlane had been "taken" and Margaret "left" was very confusing to her faith, such as it was; but still her language, and to a certain extent her thoughts, were modified by the sudden influx of piety in the parish. "It goes where it listeth," she said to herself, as she went indoors, "as the Bible says. It's no to be counted on. Naething is to be counted on with a young lass. She'll hae her fling though she's a lady born. And Margaret there, puir thing, that never kent what it was to have the life dancing in her bits of veins! I'm, maybe, hard on her mysel," Jean murmured, pausing a moment at the closed door of the parlour. There was a sound of weeping from within, which touched her heart. She listened, hesitating whether to interfere. "If she had twa-three words to say to her lad on the hill, there was nae harm in that," said Jean to herself; and moved by recollections, she knocked at the door. "Lasses, ten's chappit," she said. "The bairns are in their beds, and Margaret should aye be bedded as soon as the bairns. As for *her* there, likely she meant nae harm. Let her gang to her bed and say her prayers, and we'll think on't *nae mair.*"

"I hope my own sister may say what she likes," said Isabel, starting up and turning on the good natured mediator with her bright eyes full of tears "There is nobody has a right to meddle between Margaret and me."

"Oh, hush, hush," said Margaret, "you two. I am not finding fault with her—and she is not ungrateful to you. It is a thing will never happen again."

"No—till the next time," said Jean Campbell closing the parlour door after her with rising irritation "Am I a fool to mind what the silly thing says?" she said to herself, as she fastened the cottage door. Just then the sound of another foot scattering the gravel on the road came to her ear. With natural curiosity she reopened the door, leaving a little chink by which she could see through. "I kent it was him," she said triumphantly within herself. Though it was so dark there was something about young Stapylton's appearance, as a stranger and foreigner, which was instantly distinguishable to rural eyes. Jean looked out with keen curiosity as he passed. He could not see her, nor could he perceive the loop-hole through which her eyes watched him. To him the house was all dark and silent, shut up in its usual tranquillity. He paused before it, and inspected it all round, evidently with the idea that Isabel might be lingering outside. When he saw the light in the parlour window, he turned away with an exclamation of disgust, and shook his fist at the house which contained his love. The astonished watcher could not hear what he muttered to himself, nor divine what was the cause of his wrath; but she threw the door open, and shook her fist at

him in return, with prompt resentment. "It's a dark night for a long walk, Maister Stapylton," Jean called out to him, with fierce satisfaction; "and there's an awfu' ill bit down there where the burn's broke the bank. Can I len' you a lantern till you're past the burn?"

The young man quickened his steps, and went rambling on detaching the stones down the rugged road with some inarticulate angry answer of which Jean could make nothing. The disappointed wooer was in no very good humour either with himself or the household, which he pictured to himself must be laughing over his failure. Jean, for her part, put up the bolt with demonstration when she had thus gratified her feelings. The "lad," whom his lass had left disconsolate on the hill, was fair game in the eyes of the peasant woman, and the little matter was concluded when he was thus sent angry and humbled away.

But it was not so in the parlour where Isabel was telling her story with many tears. Margaret, whose mind had long been abstracted from all such thoughts, listened with a curious mingling of interest and pain. That it could ever have entered into the mind of her sister to leave her thus suddenly, without warning, was an idea that filled her with consternation. She was silent while the confession was being made, confused as if a new world had suddenly opened up before her. Not a word of reproof did Margaret say; but she listened like a creature in a dream. Love!—was it love that could work so, that could be so pitiless? The virgin soul awoke appalled, and looked out as upon a new earth. *Even Isabel did not* know the effect her

words produced. Her penitence fell altogether short of the occasion. She was sorry for having listened, sorry for having given patient ear for a moment to such a project, but she was not utterly bewildered, like Margaret, to think that such a project could be.

"And he thought, and I thought," cried Isabel, alarmed by her sister's silence, "that you could never be long left when Ailie's cured and well. He would never have dreamed of it, but that he believed, like me——. Oh, Margaret! it's slow to come, but it's coming, you're sure it's coming? God would never forsake *you*."

"He will never forsake me," cried Margaret; "but, Bell, I cannot be cured. That is not the Lord's meaning for me. And if I had been well, you would have run away and left me!" she added, with a little natural pang. Isabel could not encounter the wistful reproach in her eyes; she threw herself down by her sister's side, and hid her face in Margaret's dress.

"If you had been well, you would not have minded," she sobbed: "if you had been well, somebody would have been coming for *you* as well as for me."

"For me!" said the sick girl—her voice was too soft for indignation, too soft for reproach; and yet an ineffable touch of both was in the tone. "Yes," she said, after a pause, "the Bridegroom is soon coming for me; I hear his step nearer and nearer every day. And, Bell, I will not say a word. It is nature, they all tell me; I am not blaming you."

"If you would blame me, if you would but be wild at me!" cried Isabel, weeping, "it wouldna be so hard to bear."

Margaret bent down over the prostrate creature; she

put her arms round the pretty head, with all its brown locks disordered, and pressed her own soft, faintly-coloured cheek upon it, "It is but God that knows us all, to the bottom of our hearts," she said, "and He is always the kindest. We are all hard upon our neighbours, every one—even me that should know better and am aye talking. But, Bell, it cannot be well for him to tempt you; you should listen to him no more."

"I will never, never speak to him again!" cried Isabel.

"Not that—not so much as that," said Margaret; "but he should not tempt my Bell to what is not true."

And then the penitent girl felt her sister's kiss on her forehead, and knew herself forgiven, and her fault passed over. She rose grateful and relieved, and the weight floated off her mind. The only one with whom the incident of the evening left any sting was the one who had most need of love's consolation—the sick girl who loved everybody, and whom even God cast into the background, leaving her in the shade. Poor Margaret went to her rest confused and stunned, not knowing what had befallen her. All were preferred to her, both by man and by God.

CHAPTER IV.

Next morning the household in the Glebe Cottage found itself solaced and comforted from the excitement of the night. To Jean Campbell the incident was commonplace; "No a thing to make a work about," she acknowledged frankly; while even Isabel, except for a certain *sense of excitement* and giddiness as she settled

down to ordinary things, comforted herself, like a child, that the matter was over, and that she should hear no more of it. Margaret's too early maturity, her deeper seriousness, the solemnity with which her illness and the shadow of death surrounded her, had kept Isabel a child, and made her look up to her twin-sister almost as to her mother. Margaret not being "angry," everything would naturally come right. Young Stapylton, finding his overtures of no avail, would come humbly and penitent to be forgiven, and would give up his wild project, and all would go well again. Thus Isabel felt, leaning unawares with the sense of security which is conveyed by dependence, on her sister as her guide. The only sting which came out of that darkling interview on the hill had gone into Margaret's heart.

When Mr. Lothian paid her his usual afternoon visit, he found the sick girl, as usual, in her invalid chair, with her knitting in her hands. Isabel had left the room only as he became visible on the road, and her work lay in a little heap on the table. He cast a hasty look at it, even at the moment when he greeted the other sister. That evidence of an abrupt departure was of more consequence than it ought to have been to the minister. He shook his head as he sat down by the abandoned work.

"She need not have run away when she saw me coming," he said, with a little sigh. "I could have said nothing to anger her, here."

"She did not mean it," said Margaret. "She is hasty, like a bairn. I am afraid sometimes I have made too much a bairn of her. I have grown so old myself, and she is so bonnie and young."

"Too bonnie and young," said the poor minister;

and then he roused himself to a sense of justice; "but not younger—nor bonnier either for that matter—than you, my poor Margaret. It is your illness that makes you feel a difference. I remember two years ago——"

"I would rather forget that," said Margaret, with a faint blush. "It is not illness, but death, that makes the difference, and sometimes I wonder what will become of her when I'm gone. I'm not meaning that I am of so much importance. I know well the world goes on just the same, whoever is taken away; but I feel as if I should always want to take care of Bell, even in heaven."

"It may be so permitted for aught we know," said Mr. Lothian; and then he paused and looked at her wistfully, as if there was something more that he would like to say.

"And I know, if all's well, there are friends that will do their best to take care of her on this earth," said Margaret, declining to make any response to this anxious look. "And there are times when I feel a great longing to win away."

"You have been in pain?" said the minister, who, confused with his own hopes and feelings, did not know what to say.

"Not in pain," said Margaret; "maybe disturbed a little, and troubled in my mind. I think nobody understands another's heart. We are so selfish, aye striving to be first. There is but the Lord that can control our very thinking, and keep down vain expectations; but it is a struggle to flesh and blood," she added, with a faint smile.

"You are thinking of what is going on in the parish," *said Mr. Lothian,* "and of Ailie——"

"I'm wearied hearing of Ailie," said Margaret, with a thrill of impatience. "Is God to have but one way of working? and is it so great a thing to be kept in this chilly world, instead of being taken home? I am not thinking of Ailie; I'm thinking of very different things. Mr. Lothian, is he a lad you can trust—that English lad?"

"What English lad?" said Mr. Lothian, with a certain sullen dulness which he put on in a moment like a mask. "Is it young Stapylton, you mean?"

"What kind of folk does he come of?" said Margaret, pursuing her examination steadily. "Is he true and sure? You brought him here, and you've known him long, and you must be able to tell."

"If I brought him here, I am very sorry," said the minister; "but I don't think I did. He saw—your sister at Lochhead; and God forgive me if I do the boy injustice—perhaps I am not a just judge—but I put little confidence in him, Heaven knows, for my part."

Margaret clasped her hands tightly together with a look of pain, but she said nothing; and after a little pause her companion resumed,—

"It is hard for me to speak when you know so well what I am thinking. I would guard her like the apple of my eye. The wind should not blow on her. I am not a young fellow like Stapylton, but she would be safer with me."

"Ay," said Margaret; and a touch of pathos unusual to it had crept into her voice; "but she is safest of all in the house she was born in, where love's free and for nought. I don't mean to be unkind, Mr. Lothian. It's a deceitful heart that speaks; but if I were well the

morn, Bell would go away from me; and till I die there will aye be somebody setting their heart against me to get me out of the way—maybe even you."

"Never me," said the minister. "I think myself your brother, Margaret—whether or no——"

He put out his hand, and took her wasted hand into his. The first fret that had crossed it for years was on poor Margaret's brow. To think of her sister as happy eventually, when her own grave was green, was sweet to the dying girl. But the conflict in Isabel's mind now, of happiness and self-sacrifice, was the hardest burden that had ever fallen on her delicate spirit. It seemed to introduce an alien note into the soft concords of the ending life.

"Yes, whether or no," said Margaret, with a faint smile; "and I wish you would preach to me now. I never get to the kirk with other folk. I am growing a law to myself, I fear, instead of minding the true law. Speak to me, for I'm wearied and cannot speak to myself."

"It is you that have taught me many a day," said the minister; and then he paused, and that pang of pity with which the strong sometimes look on the weak thrilled through him. She was as young as Isabel. If sickness had not broken the soft outlines of her face and hollowed out her eyes, she would have been as fair as Isabel; and yet death was the only prospect before the one sister, while everything that was bright in life lay at the feet of the other. This sudden strong compunction silenced the man. What could he say?—that the touch of nature stirring in her was wrong? that it was wicked to feel that prick of wounded love? that *this last stab was a crowning* manifestation of the love

of God? There were many in his position who would have said this boldly; but he, who knew her so well, had not the heart.

"Margaret," he said, "you know I cannot speak to you as many can; your sickness comes from the hand of God, and you have never repined against Him. What comes from the clash and contradiction of human feelings is a different burden to bear. It seems a feature in our life that we must go against each other daily, whether we will or no. There is no happiness but has trouble in its train. What is joy to her is grief to you. What would be comfort to you, would sicken me and —aye, I will be just to him—one other, with disappointment and pain. The lassie that was married in the village yesterday made her mother's heart bleed; but her own would have suffered as sorely, and so would the lad's, if she had not married. What can we say? It is not trouble of God's sending, but the complications of human nature. He looks down from heaven and beholds and tries the children of men, as says the Scripture. It is the one that bears the heat and the cold, the long calm and the fierce tempest, that is Christ's soldier; but the cold and the heat, and the calm and the storm, are all natural—not punishments of God, but necessities of the world. We have to brace our minds up to them. It's a cross world, and its conditions must be borne,—I do not say because God sends them of first purpose and will—but always for Christ's sake."

"Ay," said Margaret, "I think I had a glimmering of that. It is no that God delights to cross us at every point, as some folks say;—it's nature—and one spirit, differing from another. But He put us all in this cross

l our hard conditions. He wove
, the warp aye crossing the woof.
all wrong? You say love is the
but look what bitterness, and tribu-
ment it works. I am not meaning
is kind; I am meaning the love
where all is given and nought
l give them the hearts out of our
k on us as cumberers of the ground
of their happiness!" cried the girl,
r flashing over her face and light
yes. Then she made a pause, and
. she bent down her face into her
was the only time in her life that
in passionate remonstrance against
d limits of humanity. Her com-
lder than she was. He had gone
any a later stage of human develop-
on pitying and tender upon that
st the intolerable. He took softly
rly grasp her thin white hand, but
ything. There was indeed nothing

recovered herself she drew her hand
re blushed the nervous, sudden blush
u'll think I am a miserable creature,"
e at others' happiness; but it is not

" said the minister. "It is not that.
want in this poor world; and there's
are nothing but jars and discords,
ll mean to each other. Here in this
e there is more fervour, more true

piety, I know it, than there was a little while ago—and yet——"

"You are not satisfied," said Margaret, suddenly waking up out of her personal concerns.

"I am far from satisfied," he said. "I tell you there is more piety, more fervour—and yet what a price it is bought at! Ailie Macfarlane has the gift of tongues, she says, and so has Big Robert at the clachan and his sister, and Mr. John at Ardnamore. They rant and they speak, sometimes in English, sometimes in that wild way. It's very impressive to hear her, Margaret. It's not her business, and she tells you nothing you do not know. But to see the young creature, with all the poetry in her, standing up among the people in the gloaming, when it's nearly dark, and pouring forth her soul, is very impressive. A man would be made of wood if it did not go to his heart."

"And she gives new light?" said Margaret, eagerly; "she makes the Scriptures clear, or she sets the ways of God before you? Then never mind the rest."

"So people say," said Mr. Lothian, "but I cannot see it. She gives no new light to me. I ask myself sometimes is it the jealousy of my office that cannot bear to be superseded? But I don't think it is that. My heart is sore, Margaret; I think my Master's work will lose credit by such wild service; and then I think of the uninstructed, and that a wonder or a parable may strike them more than anything we can say. And that is true. The people come to the meetings as they would not come to me. And nobody can deny that Ailie has risen from her sick bed to become a preacher among us. What am I to say?"

"I would say nothing," said Margaret, "I would

wait and leave it all to God. Let it be, and if it is of God, it will stand. It is old advice, and not mine alone. You tell me it is human nature, when I make my grumble; and it is human nature there too. She's one that will have signs and wonders,—her spirit is craving,—always craving. But you'll mind I said it when I'm gone—there's no cheatery in Ailie. She may deceive herself, she may take her dreams for true,—but she means it all every word. You are not to disbelieve her, Mr. Lothian. In her heart she is true."

"Which just makes her all the more dangerous," said the minister, shaking his head. "She believes in herself. She believes all she says. My dear, they are praying and praying for you, and it's Ailie's hope that you are to rise with her, and go forth—what shall I call it,—as prophets, evangelists?—to the end of the earth. If they were to do that, Margaret, I would believe too."

Margaret's pale face flushed once more; it was not in human nature to subdue the thrill of the dying frame when life and strength seemed thus held out to it. Her soft eyes fixed on the vacant air before her. "What would you believe?" she said. "Do you think I doubt He could raise me up if He pleased, just as He could make me a queen if He pleased, instead of a poor country girl? But why? You were saying we were under hard conditions in this world—but they are the conditions we're born to; and which is best, to suffer them loyally, or break out of them by force? I do not think myself," she went on dreamily, "that He wanted to raise up Lazarus. It's against reason. It would make a revolution in the world if all the dead were *to come back. He did it* because the sisters

wearied Him with their continual craving. I've thought that all over, and I see it could not be. The foundations of the world would be overturned if every yearning woman got back her dead. It couldna be. Worse and worse would come of it. Do you not see it could not be? God would have to change the whole frame of things before His time. Now and then there is one that cries and cries so sore, and will not be denied. Why did He weep when He raised Lazarus? it would not be for Lazarus' sake. Was it because they wearied Him with their crying till He had to do it, but knew well He could not do it, and must not do it, for all the rest? Now that is like her and me," said Margaret, after a pause, her face melting into a smile. "She's cried and cried till she's been granted; but I can see it's against reason. I'm not the one to make a work. He is not to be troubled to change life and all its laws for the like of me."

"Margaret, you speak as if He were a man to be wearied and troubled," said the minister, with a half reproof.

"He said it Himself," said the girl. "He is my nearest friend. He is more to me than all the world. And am I to vex Him and make Him ask for what's against God's Providence? He died Himself; and they were all too confused to say a word—nobody cried to the Father to overturn the foundations of the earth and save Him; and why should it be done for me?"

She crossed her hands upon her breast as she spoke, and lay back, with her simple countenance rapt into a half-celestial calm, her eyes dilated, her fine nostrils expanded, her soft lips closed; she wanted but the cross in her clasped hands to embody the picture

of a martyr; she wanted but a lily to realise the triumphant saint. But Margaret knew no symbols Her religion, perhaps, was too bare of form and letter; it was of the spirit—a spirit full of the lofty submission of reason as well as faith.

In the silence that followed, and which Mr. Lothian made no attempt to disturb, sounds from without made themselves heard by degrees. There came an echo of steps on the road, and voices at the door. Margaret gave no heed, being absorbed in her own thoughts. But the minister, more used to the popular commotion, roused himself, and listened anxiously. Then there was a little parley outside. Mr. Lothian hurried out, to stay, if possible, the visit which he had foreseen. The group at the door was as great a contrast as could be imagined to the calm of the scene he had just left. Isabel stood, with flushed cheeks and clasped hands, before the parlour-door, half barring the entrance, half showing the way. Jean Campbell stood at the door of the kitchen, holding up her hands in excitement and partial terror. "Eh, if it could be—if it could but be!" she cried. "Our Margaret, that was aye a child of God! Oh, Ailie woman, think weel before you disturb her. I'll no have her disturbed!—but if it was the will of God——"

"It's the will of God that brings me here," said the young prophetess of Loch Diarmid. She was scarcely older than the patient to whom she came. She stood on the threshold of the house, in simple, ordinary dress, a fair Lowland beauty, with abundant light locks, a delicate, half-hectic colour, and blue eyes *à fleur de tête*, which, in her excitement, seemed absolutely to *project from her face.* They were the visionary, trans-

lucent eyes, not giving out, but absorbing, the light, which so often reveal the character of a mystic and enthusiast. She was no deceiver, it was evident, but believed in her own mission with a fervour which, to some degree, overcame the incredulity of every sympathetic spectator. Her belief in herself had given to Ailie some of the half-theatrical features of a prophetess and inspired maid. It was not that she meant or understood them to be theatrical; but she had let loose from her own mind and conduct those limits of ordinary restraint and decorum, which confine the impulses of ordinary mortals. It was her duty henceforward to say the words that came to her lips, whatever those words might be, for were they not from God? The visionary gaze of her eyes was no longer restrained by the modesty of nature or conventional respect for others. If she was the chosen of God, as she believed, it was her duty to fix those wild orbs wherever the Spirit directed her, to gaze into the very hearts of others, and read their minds in their faces. It was her duty to go to the house where God sent her, whosoever might oppose. What was it to her that her visit might be considered intrusive, or her words uncalled for? A higher rule regulated the actions of the servant of God. Therefore Ailie gave all her peculiarities, both of mind and appearance, full freedom, and, taking her impulses for God's will, obeyed them without hesitation. But this is no story of a sensual mind letting itself go into the uncleanness of fanaticism. The girl was a pure and innocent girl. Pride, self-opinion, self-importance, wild self-will, might be in her, but nothing base or vile. She moved forward, with that strange directness which only primitive nature or passion ever

the room in which Margaret was.
f Isabel who stood in the way.
he Lord," said the inspired crea-
ister, who stood there ready to
his friend against all comers, gave
a strange thrill of something like
—it was possible—God had em-
rs before now. A creature spot-
l young, in the first glow of love,
husiasm, could any human thing
s? And the angels were God's
thian stood back subdued—his own
g sense standing him in no stead
t of the moment. Had he opposed
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ht almost be insanity, was in his
e as unlike as if one had been an
from heaven, and the other one of
ll from them with Lucifer. The
l grew red, and put up his hand to
progress of this unexpected visitor;

although it was already very well known that "Saul was among the prophets," and "Mr. John," heretofore of a very different character, had entered their ranks.

"Mr. John, this is no place for you," said Mr. Lothian. "You have no need that I should tell you that. This is no place for you."

"Wherever God's work is to be done is the place for me," was the answer; and the speaker pressed on. He was a powerful man, and a scuffle there might have been fatal to the dying girl; but yet the minister confronted him, and put his hand on his breast.

"It is not the work of God to disturb his dying saint," said Mr. Lothian. "She'll soon be free and in your way no longer. Let her go in peace."

"Go?" cried Mr. John, "dying?—never while God is faithful that promised. Stand back and let us in; it is to save her life."

But it was not this or any more likely reason; it was simply to prevent the noise of contradiction and controversy from reaching Margaret, that Mr. Lothian yielded. He himself followed the stranger into the room, and Isabel crept after him. By this time the sun had set, and the daylight began to wane. Perhaps Margaret had guessed what the interruption meant. She was sitting as she had been when Mr. Lothian left her, with her hands crossed upon her breast, motionless, her eyes fixed upon the soft obscurity that gleamed in through the window. She turned her head half round as they all entered. "Ailie, is it you?" she said. There was scarcely any surprise in her voice. "I heard what had happened, and I knew you would be sure to come to me."

Her perfect quiet, the composure of her attitude, the calm face gleaming like something cut in marble against the grey wall, had a certain effect even upon the young enthusiast. She made a pause ere she began, and her companion, who had been standing behind her, came round to her right hand, and gazed eagerly upon Margaret's face. The moment she saw him, Margaret, too, was disturbed in her composure; she started and gave a little cry and raised herself up in her chair; while, as for the intruder, he pressed forward upon her with eyes that burned in their deep sockets and an air of restrained passion, before which for the moment the fever of Ailie's inspiration sank into the shade.

"Has it come to this?" he said. "And I was never told, never called to her! But, thanks be to God, we are still in time, and the prayer of faith will save——"

"Mr. John," said Margaret, raising herself erect, "this is no place for you. Why should you be told or called to me? If Ailie has anything to say I am content to hear her; but you and me are best apart."

"Why should we be best apart," cried Mr. John, "when you know what my heart is? No, I will not go. Be silent all of you; how dare you interfere between her and me? I have come with one of God's handmaidens to save her life."

"Let him be," said Ailie. "We've come here together that we may hold the Lord to His promise. Margret Diarmid, I've come to bid you rise up and be strong as I am. O woman! can you lie there and see the world lying in wickedness, and no find it in your heart *to throw off the bonds* of Satan? Why should

ye lie and suffer there? It's no doctors you want, it's faith you want. We a' ken you're a child of God. Margret, hearken to me. I was like you, I was in my bed, worse than you, and pondered and pondered and kept silence till my heart burned. I said to mysel why was it? and the Lord taught me it was Satan and no His will. Do you think I lay there one day mair? I listened to the voice that was in my ears. I thought no more of flesh and blood; I rose up and here I am. Margret Diarmid, I command you to rise up in the name of the Lord!"

They all gathered close, with an uncontrollable thrill of excitement, to listen to this appeal and to see the result of it. Isabel fell on her knees beside her sister, and gazed at her to see the change, if any came. Ailie, with her hands raised over Margaret's head, and her face lifted to heaven, waited for her answer. John Diarmid by her side, with a look of wilder passion still, hung over the group in speechless excitement. Even Jean Campbell behind stood wringing her hands, feeling her heart beat and her temples throb. Was it the Spirit of God that was about to come, shaking the homely room as by a whirlwind? There was a pause of awful stillness during which nobody spoke. When Margaret answered, the bystanders started and looked at each other. The calm tone of her voice fell upon their excited nerves like something from a different world.

"I hear *your* voice, Ailie," said Margaret, with the softness of a whisper, though her words fell quite distinct and clear upon their ears, "but I hear no voice within. Can you not believe that God may deal one way with you and another with me?"

"God has no stepbairns," cried Ailie. "Does He love me better than you? O neebors! on your knees, —on your knees! Will He no remember His ain word that's passed to us and canna be recalled. What two or three agree to ask is granted afore we speak. It's no His consent, but her's we have to seek!"

Then she threw herself on her knees, with upturned face and hands stretched out. They all sank down around her, filling the darkening room with kneeling figures. Even the minister, whose office was thus taken out of his hands, knelt down behind the girl who took such wild authority upon her, and bent his face into his clasped hands, moved, as only the prevailing excitement of the time could have moved him, by that faint tinge of possibility which was in the air. Isabel, kneeling too, took her sister's hand, and watched her with an intense gaze which seemed to penetrate to her very heart.

And Ailie prayed: "O Thou that dwellest in the heavens!" she cried, turning her visionary face to the pale twilight sky that looked wistfully in through the window, "Father, that lovest us weel! look down and see what man cannot do, what Thou canst dŏ at a word, at the lifting of Thy finger. If she hasna the faith to rise up, give her the faith. O Lord, Lord, Thou hast promised!—Thou hast promised! Is God a man that He should repent? Look on us here before Thee, two or three all agreed. O Lord God!" cried Ailie, pausing and bursting forth with sobs that broke her voice, "do you no mind what you said? If it had been man that said it, we would never have lippened to man. O Lord, Thy promise! We are waiting,—waiting,—waiting!—*Bid her to rise like Lazarus!* Loose her bonds like

the woman's in Galilee! Oh! raise her up, Lord God, as Thou hast raised me!"

It would be impossible to describe the impassioned cry that thus rose up in the silence. There was no one in the room except Margaret, who escaped the contagion of that strange emotion. She had fallen back into her chair in weakness, and gazed at them with calm and pitiful looks, like those of an angel. Hers was the only heart that beat no faster. She lay and looked at them all as a creature past all the storms of life might be supposed to look at those still tossing on its stormy tide. She was not roused by the appeal made to her faith, nor overwhelmed by the fervour of the prayers, the tears, the exclamations, the bewildered, breathless expectations by which she was surrounded. She put one arm softly round Isabel, who knelt by her side, and with her other hand took hold of Ailie's, which was stretched up over her in entreaty. There seemed to be something mesmeric in the touch of those cool, soft fingers. Ailie's outstretched arms fell; her eyes turned to Margaret's face; a strange wonder came over her countenance; her voice died away as if surprise had extinguished it; and then there was again another pause, full of fate.

"Ailie, God hears," said the sick girl; "and He will give me life; but not here, and not now. You're not to think your prayers refused. I'm near to the gate, and I can hear the message sent. It says, 'Ay, she shall be saved; ay, she shall rise up; not in earth, but in heaven.'"

"No," said Ailie, passionately; "it's no a true spirit of prophecy; it's an evil spirit come to tempt you. No. O ye of little faith, wherefore do ye doubt? Is

the Lord to be vexed for ever with this generation that will not believe? Listen to His voice. Arise, arise! shake off the bonds of Satan. Rise up, and stand upon your feet. Margaret, let not God's servants plead in vain. Oh, hearken to me while I plead with you, harder, far harder, than I have to plead with God. Why will ye die, O house of Israel? Rise up and live: I command you in the name of the Lord!"

"Oh, if you would but try! O my Maggie, will you try?" sobbed Isabel, clasping her sister closer, and gazing with supplication beyond words in her face.

And the minister lifted his face from his hands, and looked at her; and little Mary, who had stolen in, came forward like a little wandering spirit, and threw herself, with a cry, on Margaret's shoulder, in a wild attempt to raise her up. This last effort of childish passion was more than the sick girl could bear. She turned round upon them all with a wondering burst of patience and impatience.

"Is there no one to understand?" she said, with a plaintive cry, and drew her hands away and covered her face with them in a kind of despair. Even her own had turned, as it were, against her. Her bodily strength gave way; her heart failed her; no response woke in her mind to those wild addresses. That they should leave her alone, alone, was all she longed for —only to be left in quiet, to be at peace.

Then the minister stood up, and took Ailie by the arm. She was shivering and trembling with the revulsion, worn out with her excitement. Her moment of "power" was over.

"*You can do no more here*," he said, with a thrill

in his voice which betrayed how much he himself had been moved. "She is worn out, and you are worn out, and here there is no more to say. Ailie, for God's sake come with me, and disturb her no more."

"O friends, it's the wiles of Satan," said Ailie. "Oh, to think he should be there! Margret—Margret, how can I leave you to perish! Let me stay by her day and night, and wrestle with Satan for his prey!"

"You will come with me," said Mr. Lothian, firmly, and then the passionate creature burst into choking sobs and tears. Poor Margaret, whose thread of life was worn so thin, whose weakness could so ill bear the struggle, sat in the gathering twilight, and looked on while the prophetess, who had come to heal her, was led, like an exhausted child, from her presence. She gave a long sigh of relief when the scene was over. Once more she crossed her thin hands upon her breast, where her heart was fluttering faintly, yet wildly, with weariness and pain. "Oh, to be away! oh, to be away!" she said to herself. Life had grown weary to her, a burden to be cast off, not a glorious hope to be secured. She stood at the opposite pole of existence, and had ceased to remember how sweet that living was to which they would fain have dragged her back. "Oh, to be away!" she said, crossing her hands upon her fluttering heart. She thought she was alone, but a sound close to her startled her back again into a little flush of agitation. "I am worn and weaker," she said, driven to the limit of her powers. "Oh, will ye let me be? Whoever you are, leave me and my life to God!"

"Margaret, it is I," said a deep voice close to her ear. "*Why will* you die? Do you know my heart

my last hope? Am I to live
you live—will you live, and
argaret, because I have been ill
e!"
Margaret started from her seat.
cried, "how dare ye speak to
bear the blame of your blessing
u had the heart of a man, you
les rather than enter here."
ur door like a dog," said the
ther than be banished like this:
e ends of the earth, Margaret,
, and not die!"
rd pleases," said the poor girl,
ble hands in the darkness for
as worn out. Before her per-
r she had sunk upon the floor
soon reached the length of un-
women, rushing in at his cry,
. She had not fainted to be out
t throbbed against her breast, as
be free. Poor Margaret! the
ore hard to meet than all that

APTER V.

appearance at the Glebe had thus
ors, had been for a long time the
re-seeking and dissipation to the
been the *jeunesse orageuse*, which,
and beginning of life, has ceased
side of the Channel. A quaint

old house on the eastern side of the loch, and a few hillsides which had been in the family for centuries, were all his patrimony; but his mother had transmitted a moderate fortune to her only child, which he had got rid of in his younger days in gayer scenes than could be found on the Loch. When he had returned perforce, all his money being spent, to his long-neglected home, Mr. John for some years had taken rank as the Don Giovanni of the district. He had been so far prudent or fortunate as never to be the object of any unusually grave scandal. Miss Catherine, rigid as she was in morality, had not been compelled to shut her doors against her own connexion, but had been able to doubt, to extenuate, to find excuses for him. "Left to his own will when he was but a callant," she would say, "flattered and served hand and foot by them that led him away. If I am to shut my doors on the poor lad, where would he get a word of advice, or be shown the error of his ways?"

It was thus that Mr. John, pursuing his pleasures with such daring as was possible, preserved still a shred of superficial character. And then the time had come when vulgar dissipation palled on the man. For a year or two he had partially recovered himself, and turned to a better life; and during this interval it was that he became acquainted with Margaret. Mr. John, whose family was unimpeachable, was a great man to Captain Duncan, whose slender connexion with the aristocracy of the district was built more upon the gentility of his first wife than even on his commission. And no doubt a rude attempt at match-making had been planned by the old soldier. As for the two principally concerned, Margaret, who knew little of his

previous character, had been naturally attracted by the best-bred and best-mannered man she had ever been brought into contact with; and he, a passionate soul in his way, seeking emotion and excitement through all his pleasures, had been suddenly seized upon by the pure and visionary creature, whose life was to him as a new revelation. Yet, notwithstanding his sense of her utter purity, notwithstanding his love for her, and the new germ of moral improvement within him, the habits of his former life, and the contempt in which he held her upstart father, had led him, strange as it may seem, to entertain dishonourable designs towards the spotless girl, who looked up to him as a higher type of manhood than any she had yet met with. Captain Duncan, hot enough in all that concerned his honour, had somehow discovered the suitor's base meaning, and expelled him from his house with all the violence that belonged to his character. When Margaret became aware of the storm that raged round—when she found her lover shut out from the place, and herself forbidden to think of him, a brief tumult rose in her maidenly bosom. She might have resisted even, for her sense of justice was strong, and she had begun to love, had fiery Duncan been left to manage matters in his own way. But Mr. Lothian had stepped in with his good sense, and Jean Campbell, homely as she was, with his support, had brought her woman's wit to work on the question. The two between them brought one of Mr. John's victims quietly by night to tell her miserable story. Other miserable stories poured upon Margaret's ear when the ice was broken. She gave but one cry, and went away from them and shut herself up *in her own room. Nothing* was said to her of any

intended disrespect to herself. If she ever guessed the existence of such a horror, she never betrayed it to mortal ear; but the parish knew well enough why it was that Mr. John had the door of the House shut upon him, and was curtsied to by Miss Catherine with awful grandeur when they met at the church-door.

This sealed his fate so far as the Loch was concerned. His own race and class abandoned him to the devil and all his angels, to whom accordingly he devoted himself for some months with renewed spirit. But disgust had entered his heart; he had seen better things, and his soul had begun to move uneasily within him. Then commenced the religious movement which stirred the parish of Loch Diarmid. Mr. John, dreary, mournful, and alone, was one of the first to be moved by it. Here was, indeed, a religion worth having, one that held out to him the hope of immediate reward, the highest advantage that flesh and blood could hope for, deliverance from sickness, miraculous strength, favour, and power. He went into it with all the fervour of his nature. He was converted with much rejoicing on the one hand, and blackest painting of all his former errors on the other, as is natural in such cases. From penitence he went on rapidly to the highest grace, to own the inspiration of Ailie, and to believe in her and in himself. It was a curious process altogether, and yet it was not so inconsistent with nature as might have been supposed.

The man had lived a wicked, sensual, evil life; but had not been, so to speak, a sensual man. He had sought excitement in all his wanderings astray; his desire had been rather for some wild satisfaction *to a hungering*, tumultuous, undisciplined spirit, than

for the positive delights of wickedness; and now it seemed to him, in all sincerity, as if he had found the fiery satisfaction, the tumult of emotion, sensation, and feeling, for which his soul longed. He loathed himself for his sins, and rushed into religion as he had rushed into dissipation, from the same passionate thirst for excitement. He had been eating husks with the prodigal; to the depths of his heart he felt how miserable were those husks, how vile his life had been; and rushed out in an agitation which was changed, yet the same, to his Father's house, to find there the strange delight of welcome, the exciting feast, the flood of conflicting emotions. Whether he caught contagion from Ailie's visionary nature; whether there was anything more than contagion in it; whether the rush of thoughts, and words, and breathless fervour, was produced by an influence from heaven, or by simple specialities of nature, we do not know and cannot decide. But he had all those signs of supernatural grace. He who had gone so far astray burst forth with all the appearance of religious ecstasy into wild expositions, wild exhortations, full of fire and eloquence. It was, some said, the greatest thing that had happened—even greater than Ailie's miraculous recovery. "Is Saul also among the prophets?" those Bible-quoting people said to each other. And a certain awe gathered round the figure of Mr. John.

It had been by his special solicitation that this visit to the Glebe was made. Margaret had been ill he knew, but he did not know how ill; and with a man's natural touch of vanity, he had imagined the illness to be caused partly at least by separation from himself. He *had the fullest confidence in* Ailie's powers, and

the most entire belief that what he and she together prayed for, in the passionate faith which they shared, would be done for them by God; but he had also in his secret heart some hope that the mere sight of him, a changed and converted man, would do much for Margaret. When he saw her, not tenderly touched by sentimental illness, but worn to the edge of the grave by consuming disease, it would be difficult to describe the shock he sustained. His passion for her revived to its fullest extent; and she was dying—dying, before his eyes. And God had promised in any case, however desperate, to hear the prayer of faith. Yet there she lay, calm, steadfast, content, not eager to be saved, crushing down the excitement at its height with the touch of her soft, cool hand. The agitation which possessed him almost rose to frenzy. He was angry with Ailie, the young leader of his faith, for requiring food and rest, and desiring to go home, instead of "wrestling in prayer" along with him on the grassy bank beneath the Glebe. His vehemence was so extreme, that Ailie herself was moved to reprove it. "Brother," she said, "you're not thinking of God's glory, you're thinking of Margaret's life. Your mind's gone wild for love of her. Set up no idols in your heart."

"Love!" cried Mr. John, "and between her and me!—that will never be. But she must not die. She is a child of God. She is so beloved, I think half the country would follow after her. Shall we lose that great advantage to the Lord's cause? You have been my teacher in the way of life, must I be yours now?"

"Ay," said Ailie, "if the Lord has given you something to say."

It was Mr. Lothian, who had followed them down the hill, who heard this strange conversation. Mr. John's face changed, as was usual with all the gifted. A kind of spasm passed over him. "Hear the word of the Lord," he cried; "hear and obey! Will you go back to your selfish rest, and eat your selfish bread, and let His saint die? Is it not written, He that asketh receiveth. Shall we submit to be foiled by Satan? He is not an unjust judge, nor you a vengeful woman, and will you do less than He did to save a life? What is a night on the heather, a night on the hill, to the loss of that blessed creature? Never will she be bride of man," he cried, with a groan,—"never bride of mine nor friend of mine that you say I'm mad with love. Our fathers lived in caves of the earth, and were hunted like beasts for the sake of the truth—and will we refuse to watch a night for the salvation of a soul? Could not ye watch with me one night? We are two together that put our trust in Him, and the Lord will remember His promise when we pray."

"I will pray in my own poor chamber," cried Ailie. "O, John Diarmid, I ken you're a man of God! but your face frightens me, and your voice frightens me. I cannot bide with you on the hill. Lord, Lord, is it Thy will? I'll watch for her,—I'll pray for her,—I'll give half my life for Margret; but I darena bide here."

"My sins find me out," said Mr. John; "you are afraid of me, Ailie. You think it is the old man that speaks, and not the new."

"No," said Ailie, controlling herself, "I canna fear my brother. I know you are a man of God—but oh, will *not the Lord's purpose* be served if we pray at

home? He's as near in a chamber as on the hill. Let us not speak nor waste our strength. Let us bend our minds to it, and pray for our sister going along this weary way. It will be a holy way," cried the girl, solemnly marching along, with her young elastic figure drawn up, her hands clasped, and her eyes raised to the sky, "if we make every step in prayer. Oh, hear us; oh, open Thy hand to us; oh, save her, dear Lord!"

Mr. Lothian, when he told this tale, would melt almost into tears. "She was an innocent creature," the minister would say. He followed them softly, unseen, with a man's secret dread of the reformed sinner, ready to protect Ailie if she should want protection, and saw her move swift and silent along the path, never stumbling, never faltering, with her clasped hands and her eyes raised to heaven. Broken words of prayer fell from her lips as she went on. As for the dark shadow by her side, the minister took less note of that. But he never forgot their joint prayer, sometimes rising to a mutual outburst of supplication as they went before him over the silent road. Mr. John's spirit was rending itself with wild throes of pain, and at the same time satisfying itself with the violent strain of strongest emotion. Thus they went on until Ailie reached her mother's cottage at Lochhead. And the silent follower behind them had been praying too. When he went into the Manse, which was too quiet, too lonely for that name, the minister asked himself, would it all be without avail; would God turn a deaf ear, though the very lion and lamb together pleaded with him for a blessing—though the sinner became pure, and the suffering walked by faith? And for his part he rounded

with a sigh the excitement of the evening, and opened the Bible on his table—that Bible within whose pages there are still so many prayers unanswered, waiting till God's time shall come.

Next morning Mr. Lothian had the events of the night brought before him from another point of view. It was hard upon the minister that his house, of all the houses in the parish, should be the one to shelter his young rival—a man in himself totally uncongenial to him. But so it was; he had incautiously received a guest whom he found it impossible to send away; and Mr. Lothian had been compelled to look on and see the young fellow all but win the prize on which his own heart had been set for so long. How the trifling youth could have caught Isabel's fancy was a mystery to the good man; but naturally such a fact gave to every foolish word he uttered a double importance in his host's jealous and wondering eyes.

"I hear there was a prayer-meeting—or something—last night up at the Glebe," said Stapylton. "Was it effectual, do you know?"

"What do you mean by effectual?" said the minister, gravely.

"Oh, I thought it might have had one of two effects," said the young man with careless contempt. "It might have cured the patient, you know; or at least, so they say. And they might have prayed her to death, which I should think the most likely, for my part."

"I did not know you were so well informed," said Mr. Lothian, who was in no conciliatory mood.

"Oh, yes, I am posted up," said Stapylton, with a vain laugh, for which his companion could have knocked

him down. "I think they will find it difficult to cure consumption; but the greater the difficulty the greater the miracle. It shows, at least, that they are not afraid."

"It shows they are not impostors, as you seem to think them," said the minister with some heat.

"Oh, dear, no, not impostors," said Stapylton; "not any more than other people. We are all impostors, I suppose, more or less."

"Your views are too advanced for our rural minds," said Mr. Lothian, growing more and more angry in spite of himself. "We don't understand them. Impostors are rare in this country-side."

"Oh, yes, I believe you," said Stapylton insolently. "Do you mean to say you put any faith in that praying crew? Did you think their shouting and bawling could do any good to that poor, consumptive creature——"

"Is it Margaret Diarmid you are speaking of?" said the minister; and the men paused and looked in each other's faces. Stapylton had gone further than he meant to go. Isabel's sister was nothing to him, though he loved Isabel in his selfish way. He had no respect for Margaret as a woman, or as a sick woman; he had no appreciation of her character. She was to him simply a poor, consumptive creature, whom he would be glad to have killed or cured out of his way. If Isabel were ever his, she should not long retain any foolish devotion to her sister. Therefore he could not understand the scorn and indignation of Mr. Lothian's eyes.

"Well," he said, "I would not hurt her sister's feelings by calling her so, you know. We're all im-

postors, as I said. But still you know that is what the girl is, all the same."

The minister rose from the table impatiently, and made no answer. And this was the man to whom Isabel had given her heart!

CHAPTER VI.

"I AM saying nothing against Ailie," said Jean Campbell, "no a word. Our Margret upholds her as a God-fearing lass; but maybe she was going beyond her tether when she came praying ower our Margret. No, it was of nae avail. I never expected it for my part."

"It maun have been want of faith," said one of the eager spiritual gossips who had flocked around Jean to hear the news. "Human nature is so full o' shortcomings. We've a' looked up to her for her godly life; but the Lord will not put up with our idols. You've made an idol o' Margret Diarmid, asking her prayers; but now she's weighed and found wanting. It's been lack of faith."

"I dinna see how that can be," said another. "She's won us a' blessings morning and night. I've seen heaven written plain in her face if ever it was written in a face in this world. Na; it must have been that they were lukewarm in their prayers."

"Hoots! they canna aye win," said a third neighbour; "if a' the world was to be full of miracles where would us living folk be?"

"But it'll be a sair discouragement to the spread of the truth," said Mary White of the Mill, who had spoken *first*. "*The enemy will* cry out sore, like as if

it was a triumph. And it's ill for them of feeble minds to hear that Margret Diarmid hasn't faith to be saved, or Ailie Macfarlane lost her power."

"I would like to see the one that has more faith than our Margret," said Jean Campbell, wounded in her tenderest point. "As for Ailie she's a wonderful lass, but she's upsetting with her prophet's ways. If it had been the Lord's will, would He have bided for Ailie to ask Him? Would he no have done it for our Margret that has kent Him longer and followed Him better? I'm no pretending to ken mysel—but if ever there was a saint of God it's our Margret; and naebody need say onything else to me."

"There's naebody in our parish would try," cried Jenny Spence, who was a connexion. "As for Ailie Macfarlane she canna be said rightly to belong to the parish. It's weel kent she was brought up in the Rue, and a' her friends bide down by the Loch-end. I canna see ony reason for following after her, and thinking licht of our ain."

"Did you never hear, ye silly women," said a voice over their heads, "that a prophet has nae honour in his ain country? Bring in the new light, and cast out the wisdom that dwells among us: that's aye been the world's opinion since lang before it was divided into parishes. As for this poor lassie you make such a work about, she's hysterical, and that's the explanation of her cure and her prophesying; no that the creature means ill. She's an innocent creature, so far as I can see *the noo;* but how lang her innocence will last if this goes on——"

"Nae doubt you're a fine authority, Maister Galbraith," said Mary, with a toss of her head; "you that

believe in naething, neither spirit nor deevil, like the auld Sadducees. It's grand to come and get lessons from you."

"I believe in more than you believe in, Mary, my woman," said the schoolmaster, who had interrupted the talk; "but I'll no go into controversy. Jean Campbell, I'm wanting a word with you, if you'll come inbye as you're passing, after a' this important business is done; you were aye good at settling the affairs of the parish—but if I were you I would leave the other world in peace till you win there."

"It's much he kens about the ither world," said Mary White as the schoolmaster passed on. "Poor auld haverel, with his Latin and his poetry, that never could get a kirk, even in the auld Moderate times. The minister himself is but lukewarm; he's awfu' Laodicean in his principles; but as for the maister, I'm no sure in my mind if we're justified in sending the bairns to an unconverted character. Eh, to think o' the mercy that's come to this place lying in wickedness! A half-hearted minister that hangs on one side and doubts; a leddy like Miss Catherine, that canna bide an earnest word; and the like of this auld, sneering, unbelieving Dominie. But it's on them that deserve the least that the maist is poured out."

"If we were a' to gang by our deservings," said Jenny Spence; "but eh, woman, you dinna see what you're leading to. Is it because Margaret Diarmid is the best o' us a' that the Lord lets her be? Is it because she's holy that He's leaving her in her sickness? She's done nothing a' her mortal days but serve Him, the dear lamb! Eh, Mary, ye're an ill preacher; ye're bidding *us think ill o' the Lord!*"

"I'm saying nae mair than Scripture says," said Mary. "No the righteous but sinners to repentance. There's Mr. John o' Ardnamore; is it no a greater triumph to win him to grace and the fear o' God than if he had been blameless frae his birth, like the lad in the Bible that had kept a' the commandments? There's no a house in this parish that doesn't ken Mr. John, and the kind o' man he was. And noo he's a burning and a shining light. I ca' that a victory, if you please."

"It's just this kind of victory," cried Jean Campbell, hotly, "that if the Captain, poor man, had been to the fore it would have cost Mr. John dear. If he had ever come with his gloomy countenance to oor door, and our Margret lying like yon——."

"Whisht, woman!" said Jenny Spence, "as if Margret could ever have gotten harm from such a blackguard! He was na worthy to come in to her presence—no at the best of times; and sae I aye said to the Captain. That's what it is to be worldly-minded. You a' thought it would be a grand match, till the villain showed what was in him. But to speak as if twenty scoundrels, and twenty to that, could harm Margret——"

Jean Campbell shook her head. "I wouldna say it to another mortal but you twa," she said. "We're auld friends; but the innocent thing liket him well. I canna tell if she ever found out the ill he meant. Me mysel did I ever think he would dare to have onything but a true meaning to the Captain's daughter, and her a lady born? But he's a bonnie man to come and pray over our Margret! He's a pleasant kind o' con*verted character* to show about the country-side! Lord!

I would murder him if he came, in daylight that I could see him, praying over me!"

"Jean, Jean," said Mary solemnly, "your aye the auld woman. You take a' thing in the view of nature; but the greatest sinner is aye the greatest saint when he wins to grace."

"As long as he bides far from me," cried Jean; "but I'll have no commerce with the like of Mr. John. Good day to ye both if that's a' ye have to say. I wouldna gie a wee word of our Margret for a' the saints and a' the miracles that ever were kent in this world. And I'm gaun to speak to the maister as he bid me. It's something about my Jamie, nae doubt. I'll bid ye baith good day."

The women had been standing at the corner of the only street in the hamlet of Lochhead. The village consisted of two irregular lines of houses, advancing to and receding from the curved line of the road. The highest of them had but two stories, and the generality had only a "but and a ben," a room on each side of the door; two or three possessed a homely little strip of garden, where cabbages and cabbage-roses grew peacefully together; here and there through a break in the line appeared the gleaming surface of the loch, and the heathery braes rose up behind, clothing in with a warm background the homely landscape. The church stood at one end with its inclosure of trees and graves upon a slope of the rising ground, with the school and schoolmaster's house on the opposite side of the road. This wood ran parallel with that which led to the Glebe Cottage, and a little path connecting the two crossed the hillside, dwindling to a white thread among the heather. The gossips had been standing at

one end of the village, by Jenny Spence's door, and Jean Campbell had to traverse the whole length of the street before she came to the slated house where the "maister" expected her visit. The other two stood looking after her with the criticism inevitable under such circumstances. Jenny for her part stooped to clutch by the petticoats and elevate suddenly into her arms a two-year-old creature in nondescript garments that had been creeping about her as she talked. "Eh the wee mondiewort, it's as black as a sweep," she cried, giving the child a shake. "Poor Jean, she's no as lightfooted as I mind her. The Captain he was awfu' wearing to a poor woman's temper. It was an honour for the like of her, but it's made her auld before her time."

"I canna see the honour" said Mary, "he was an auld swearing trooper, and no a man I could ever have put up wi'. The way thae men get wives! and the fuils women are to lippen to them! And thae stepdaughters and their pride, and a house that's no her ain! It's nae wonder to me if she looks auld and worn."

Jenny being a "connexion" felt her family consequence assailed: "I never said she was auld or worn. She's climbed the hill like the rest of us; and now we'll have to totter doun again, as the sang says."

"It's no like you or any serious person to take thought of a song, when it's your latter end your speaking o'," said Mary, seriously. "Jenny, I'm surprised; you're just taking the good things of this world and laying nothing seriously to heart."

"I dinna ken," said Jenny, indignantly, "what right or reason you have to find fault wi' me."

"Eh, woman, it's no a time to seek reasons," said her companion. "The Lord's working mightily by signs and wonders in the midst of us. Do you think I dinna find fault with myself more than with you? It's no a time to take your ease and seek your ain comfort. Come out to the prayer-meeting and bring your man and seek a blessing. Dinna forget, nor let him forget, that you have souls to be saved."

"Eh, I ken that," said Jenny; "but you see he likes his supper, oor man. It's the nature of men. They're mair mindful of what they eat and what they drink than women-folk. He's the breadwinner, and he works hard a' day, and I think it's but right he should be humoured at night."

"Aye," said Mary, "humour his puir dying body and destroy his immortal soul. That's the way you silly women do."

"Na, if you get to your silly women I'll no say another word," said Jenny. "I aye ken what that means. When you havena a reasonable word to answer, you're like the men and the lads—it's aye something about silly women. I've been married this sixteen year, and I'm used to that. I ken it's because you canna answer me. There's nothing about prayer-meetings in the Bible, though nae doubt they're grand things; but there's an awful deal about your man's supper and a' his little wants. Who's to look after their bits of fancies, poor fellow, but the wife?"

"And you think it's in the Bible about your man's supper," said Mary, scornfully. "Poor thing, poor thing! And that's the way you read the word of God!"

"*It's his dinner the noo,*" said Jenny, once more

clutching by its brief petticoats the child she had set down on the ground beside her, "and the bairns will be hame from the hill, and I've nae time to stand havering here."

When the last of the party was thus left alone, she shook her head and groaned within herself with a fervour not unnatural in the circumstances. "She would have stood long enough clish-clashing," said Mary to herself, "but the moment I came upon the things that concern her peace. Eh me! but it's a weary world!"

While the gossip thus came to an abrupt termination, Jean Campbell went on her way without any further pauses to the schoolhouse door. It was a summer day of the moderate warmth which summer has in Scotland under the shadow of the hills. Every quality of summer except the heat, which burns up more southern regions, was in the magical air. Sounds came softly through it charmed out of all their native rudeness. The smell of the young birch-trees, and resinous odour of the fir, came now and then in soft gusts from the hill; and the more distinct and warm sweetness of the hawthorn from the hedges breathed about the loch, surrounding it on all sides. The birds were still, for it was high noon; and so was the street in which there were few wayfarers; the "men" being all at work, and the women busy with dinners and other domestic cares at home. But the burn went trickling down the hillside into the clear still basin of the loch unsubdued by the quiet of the hour; and the hum of invisible life from the hill was almost as murmurous as if the street of Lochhead had been heather instead of rough pavement and "plainstanes." Jean went her way not without a little fret at her heart

about various matters which had touched her feelings. Chief of all, "oor Margret," who had undoubtedly sunk from her former position as the Holy Maid of the Loch. Now there was another holy maid, and Margaret was accused by profane tongues of lacking faith, which was a pain and a humiliation to her stepmother. Next in importance was the sensation of mingled excitement and indignation which filled her mind touching the untoward visit of "Mr. John;" and, thirdly, Jean's bosom throbbed with a sense that "the maister" could not have asked to speak to her for nothing, and that probably the boy had been getting into mischief. Poor Jamie was not clever, though he was "the Captain's laddie;" and there seemed reason to doubt whether he would ever be capable of education, or the sublime destiny of being a minister, to which his mother in her heart had devoted him. She went on with a homely alertness which gave the lie to her critics; but Care went behind her as he does with all the world.

Jean was in her white *mutch*, like a French peasant woman, and wore no bonnet, and had her trim apron tied round her, over her black gown. On Sundays, when she took her way to Church in all the dignity of her widow's bonnet and her "deep crape," it was altogether a different matter; but on ordinary occasions no affectation of superiority as the Captain's widow was in her mind. When she reached the schoolhouse, the maister, who had been on the watch, came himself to the door to let her in. It was a holiday, and the maister's heart was glad; but he, too, was not without his cares. He opened his door to his visitor, and brought her into a room which struck awe upon the whole village. *It was rudely shelved* in the recesses

by the fireplace, and on two of the sides of the room, and filled from the floor to the ceiling with books. The books were not better clad than their owner; but the Scotch village, with characteristic appreciation, valued them more highly on that account. "No books that you could buy and be done with," the parish said, "none of your ephemeral things wi' braw outsides." The finest russia or the most choice editions could not have been so imposing to the rural imagination as the Dominie's shabby, battered, old books. He had a great telescope, too, mounted on a stand, and a pair of old globes, and a small collection of fossils, rudely arranged in wooden boxes of his own construction. Other curious things there were, traces of pursuits eagerly entered into and soon abandoned, records of wanderings unusual in his time,—the whole story of a long, unsettled, uneasy life, driven upon itself for occupation and interest, and carrying with it memories of a thousand disappointments. The maister himself was spare and stooping, as such a man could scarcely fail to be. His voice was harsh and unmelodious, broken by much shouting to unruly urchins. He took snuff, and on the top of his head he wore a rusty wig. He was, indeed, something very like the conventional schoolmaster, poor, and worn, and tragi-comic; but that he possessed—the rarest and strangest of all his gifts, —a broad, full smile, which came over his face with curious unexpectedness, and which transfigured that worn countenance, and everything belonging to it, as by magic. You might have smiled at the Dominie and his surroundings when his face was grave and in repose—but when it lighted up you discovered with a blush that the Dominie saw the fun better than you

did, and appreciated it as no one else could; and if you were a soul of grace were abashed before him. It was a smile that encouraged others now and then, but just as often discomfited them. He threw it about upon his poor house, his pitiful belongings, his unlovely figure, like light from a lantern, noting all the grotesqueness, all the poverty. The gleam of this curious illumination which met Jean as she came in, and played on her, half cordial, half derisive, filled the woman with awe and perplexity, and made the audience to which she was thus admitted more bewildering to her, than if, as she said, "it had been the laird himsel."

"Weel, Jean, my woman," said the maister, "how's a' with ye? It's a bonnie day."

"After a' the saft weather we've had," said Jean, making the conventional answer which was expected of her. "And we're a' very weel but Margret, who's no long for this world, Maister Galbraith, though it's sair news to tell."

"No a word about that," said the maister, hastily, "and a' the fools in the country-side living and thriving! I will not speak of what I cannot understand. It's no about her I'm wanting you, but about bonnie Isabel."

"About Isabel?" said Jean, wondering: and to herself she added, "Eh, if the auld fuil's head should be turned like the lave with that bit lassie!" a mental exclamation which was unexpectedly brought to light, as it were, by one of the Dominie's broad sudden smiles.

"I might be her grandfather," he said; "and whiles I *feel as if I was grandfather to* a' these heedless things.

You've had your ain ado, Jean, my woman, with the Captain's family. Before ever you married Duncan, you mind what I said."

"I'm no complaining," said Jean, with intense and lofty pride.

"No," said the maister, "you're no the one to complain. You're too spirity for that, and too proud. And Margaret for one knows what you've done; but as for me, that have aye taken an interest in them, I'm wanting you to do more than ever, and I know you'll no be asked in vain."

"You had aye a skilfu' tongue, maister," said Jean: "you were aye one to wile the bird off the tree, when you liket to try. What is't that's coming noo?"

Upon which the maister laughed softly, for it was a point upon which he was susceptible to flattery.

"It's no laughing matter," he said; "you'll give me your best attention, Jean. You and me are not the folk to meddle with love and lovers in their wooings and nonsense; but there are times when the like of us must interfere. Bonnie Isabel is but a bairn. I know she is Margaret's twin, but there's a wonderful difference between them for all that; and yon English lad at the Manse will beguile the lass if we do not take the better heed, you and me."

"Beguile our Isabel!" said Jean, scornfully. "You ken heaps of things, maister, but no the heart of the like of her. If it was a lass out of the village, I wouldna say: but our Isabel 's a lady born."

"I stand corrected," said the maister; "you're a woman of sense, Jean Campbell, and know better than *me.* I cannot express myself like you, but this was *what I meant*—that if we did not take heed, you and

me, bonnie Isabel would be led further than she means to go; and the world, that is always an ill-thinking world, would make out a case of appearances against her. I've seen her with yon lad upon the hill——"

"And what's about that?" said Jean; "is a lass never to speak to a lad but afore witnesses? And what's the use of being young if you come to that? The lads have maist of the good things in this world; if a bonnie lass is no to have the upper hand o' them and gie their heartstrings a bit wring when she has the power to do it. Na, na, maister, if you want her to let the lad be——"

"She's ta'en a good grip of some other heartstrings I know," said the maister, "more's the pity. You've no bowels, you women. If it was but his heart that was in question, I do not say I would make much moan; but it is her credit, which is more to the purpose. Do not fire up at me; he was near running off with her the other night. You ask me how I know? Is not every secret word of your mouth or thought of your heart proclaimed on the housetops? If she were to go a step with him, it would be a sore heart for Margaret, and long would Isabel rue the day."

"I'll not believe it," said Jean. "She's prouder than the Marchioness, if you come to that. Her give way to a lad! I wouldna believe it if it was sworn to by a' the Loch. She has mair spirit than that."

"Love's blind," said the maister, with a melting tone in his harsh old voice; "it thinks no evil. He swears to her he means her well, and I would not say he did not mean well; but the day she's that lad's wife will be *an ill day for Isabel*, and all the more if she

runs off with him. Whisht! and hear me out. They have quarrelled to-day, but to-morrow they will be 'greed again;—and she has no mother. I trust her, Jean Campbell, to you."

"I dinna believe it, no a word," said Jean, rising from her chair; "but I aye do my best. No but Isabel is a sair handful, with her pride and her hasty ways. It's the flower of a' that the Lord winna spare. Eh, maister, it's mair than I can understand."

"No a word of that," said the Dominie, "or you and me will criticise our Maker, and that mustna be. He must have some reason. Thae birds' eggs are your Jamie's, Jean. He's a strange callant, awfu' slow at his lessons, and awfu' gleg on the hill."

"The hill will do him little good, maister," said Jean, discontented, "if you would but make him mind his book! It would be a terrible cross to me if he didna get on with his education, and him the Captain's son."

"He'll never mind his book," said the Dominie, promptly, "no more than his father before him. Make him a sodger if you please, like Duncan. If ye insist on schools and college, he'll never be wiser than a stickit minister, like me."

"Eh, but it's ower muckle learning with you!" cried Jean, bewildered by the smile with which the maister described his condition. She had so described him herself, not without a touch of contempt. But at the present moment her mortification about her boy was swallowed up in reverential terror for the man who thus appreciated his own misfortunes. "It's because my Jamie's ower useful with the birds' eggs, and the *trash o' flowers* they are aye gathering," Jean said to

herself, as she went home; "but I'll send him where he'll be well kept to his book, if the maister speaks like that to his mother again."

CHAPTER VII.

EXCITEMENT had once more sunk into calm at the Glebe Cottage; but Margaret, though she had recovered her composure, had suffered so much from the shock as to be unable to leave her bed next day. It was a pain to her to lose her habitual hermitage, her hours of silence on the hillside, with the meditative burn beside her, and the fair landscape below; but she was willing to husband the remnants of her strength; and it was in the little chamber which opened out of the parlour, a room which she knew must witness her last cares and last prayers on earth, that she lay by herself as the summer afternoon fell into evening. She had sent her attendants away, the door was ajar so that she might call some one if necessary, and Margaret was left alone with her habitual preoccupations with new matter for thought and new occasion for prayer.

On the other side of the wall sat Isabel trying in vain to occupy herself with her usual work. Her sister's state had filled all her thoughts the previous night. Hopes and fears about her recovery, awe and excitement about the means to be used, a terrible strain of suspense, and blank of disappointment when all was over, had withdrawn Isabel's mind entirely from her own affairs. But now that it had all passed like a dream,—now that Margaret was better, left at peace for her prayers, looking *the same as* before, and quenching *all excitement with the quiet of* her smile, Isabel's

imagination had returned in spite of her to her own love and sorrow. She had nothing to expect for all that long evening. She could not go out and sit on the heather braes, and perhaps play condescendingly with her little brother and sister, perhaps maintain a half-quarrelling, half-amiable conversation with their mother by her kitchen-door. Such a tranquil amusement had palled on Isabel since she knew what excitement was. She could not escape into a poem or story in which she could see her own youthful troubles reflected, for stories and poems were very scant on Loch Diarmid. She sat with her needle suspended in her fingers, gazing vacantly from the other side of the room at the window which she was too languid to approach. What would have been the good of looking out? He was not coming to-night, he was never coming any more, Isabel said to herself. All that she had to do was to go back to her life as it was before she knew him, and to try to content herself with that, and to look forward to a long dead blank in which nothing would ever happen, into which no step would ever come, no voice which could kindle her heart. Never more would her heart beat to hear and feel that there was some one roaming about the little house waiting till she came out—to listen to the step coming and going—the soft whistle unmarked by any ears but her own—the pebble that would strike accidentally against the window. No doubt it was all wrong and undignified, but it was the practice of the humbler girls in the district, and Isabel had never realized that there could be any harm in it. And it was sweet, very sweet, to think that one was so much beloved; and now what a *blank* it would all be when no such pilgrim came!

Isabel sat, very dismal, alone with these thoughts, her red under lip drooping a little, the corners of her mouth drawn down, her eyes fixed vacantly on the window. It was getting dark, the very hour she used to meet him. The evening star was shining high up, miles up, above the misty braes on the other side of the loch. How often had she seen it rise and grow, and tremble out of the blue depths above, while he stood by her among the great rustling bushes of the heather. And this was to be never, never more. She must watch the stars alone, out of a chill room, where there was nothing to vary the monotony of life, where the silence and vacancy would rustle in her ears and never be broken by a voice—when Margaret perhaps should be in heaven—Margaret, the only creature left her to love—and nothing but Jean Campbell, and Jean Campbell's bairns, be left belonging to her. Big tears filled Isabel's eyes as she gazed out, seeing nothing, the corners of her mouth drooping more and more, her lip quivering just a little—lost in the most pathetic sensation of youth, a deep and wondering pity for herself.

All at once she started, and sprang to her feet, changed as by a spell. She stood for a moment, irresolute, between her seat and the window. Then, by degrees, her whole expression altered. Her lip melted into the ghost of a smile, light came back to her pretty eyes; after a pause of consideration, she sat down once more by the wall. "I couldna leave Margaret," she said to herself. And she took up her work again, and worked briskly for about thirty seconds. Then she paused—listened—smiled. Ah! there could be no doubt *about it. That was the* accidental pebble that

had struck the window. That was the soft, faint whistle, the merest whisper of a call which breathed on the air. He had come back, after all. It changed the entire current of Isabel's thoughts in a moment. She had no further desire to go out, no impatience of her loneliness. These sounds had reconciled her to life and to herself. He was there, that was enough. She had even a pleasure in thinking he would have his walk and his waiting for nothing. She reminded herself of her anger and of her duty. Nothing in the world could induce her to leave Margaret. Her closed lips took a demure expression, as she sat and listened with a certain mischievous content. The blank which had seemed so intolerable and so permanent a few minutes before, flushed now with a thousand rosy colours. It was easy to deny herself, it was rather a pleasure than a pain to remain alone, so long as she knew that he watched for her and that she had not been forsaken.

Half-an-hour passed, and twice Isabel had heard, with a widening of the smile or half smile round her mouth, the familiar pebble on the window, when Jean Campbell came suddenly into the room where she was sitting. It had once occurred to Isabel, with some anxiety, that Margaret alone, in her retirement, lying still in the unbroken silence, might hear these sounds and interpret them aright; but she thought of no one else, and cared for no one else, in her youthful pride. Her stepmother's entrance disturbed her and moved her to impatience. It was seldom Jean came so far without special invitation, and never to join Isabel, who was less gentle, less patient, and had a much warmer, hastier temper than Margaret. She came in,

however, on this occasion without so much, the girl angrily remarked, "as a knock at the door." Isabel stopped working and raised her astonished eyes to Jean with a demonstrative surprise. "Did you want anything?" she asked, in her pretty, clear, but, so far as poor Jean was concerned, unsympathetic voice.

"I wanted to see if you were here," said Jean, with a mixture of softness and resentment.

"Where could I be but here," said Isabel, "and Margaret lying in her bed? Maybe you thought I was out enjoying myself," she added, with a certain pique; and just at that moment, borne upon a stronger gust than usual, came a bewildering echo of the distant whistle. In spite of herself she changed colour a little, and clutched at her work, as if to shut out the sound.

"Eh, listen!" said Jean; "what's that? I've heard it near an hour about the house. I hope it's nae ill-doer waiting about to watch for an open door."

To this unsuitable accusation Isabel listened very demurely, returning to her work. The idea amused her, and converted the half-suppressed irritatiou with which she was too often in the habit of addressing Jean Campbell, to a certain equally repressed sense of fun. As for Jean, she looked suspiciously at her companion, and continued,—

"There's mair ways of stealing than one. It might be some lad that would never meddle with siller or gold; but there's things mair precious than siller or gold—eh, Isabel, my woman!" cried honest Jean, with a thrill of true feeling in her voice.

"What are you speaking of?" said Isabel, coldly. "To *hear you, folk would think* you had some meaning.

There's little to steal at the Glebe, if that's what you are thinking. Most likely it's your son Jamie, wasting his time on the moor instead of learning his lessons. You need not be feared for him."

"I'm no feared for my Jamie," cried Jean, indignant. "He's your father's son as well as mine, Isabel, though you're so proud. He's your brother, and maybe the time will come when you'll be glad to mind that. If I could think," she added, suddenly changing her tactics and making a direct attack, "that you had the heart to keep your lad waiting on the hill, and our Margret in her bed! Eh, and there 's the proof," she added, as an indiscreet pebble at that moment glanced upon the window. "I said it, but I could not think it—the like of this from you!"

Isabel's cheeks flushed scarlet. She had been full of a great burst of indignation when this sudden evidence against her struck her ear and checked her utterance. To be sure she was in no way to blame, but yet appearances were against her, and her indignant self-defence was shorn of its fulness.

"I have nothing to do with it," she cried; "I've sat by Margaret's bedside the whole day. How am I to tell what folk may do outside? It's no concern of mine. And you 've no business to meddle with me," cried the girl, with hot unwilling tears.

"Isabel," cried Jean, with solemnity, "you think very little of me. I'm no a lady like you, though I was your father's wife; but I'm the oldest woman in the house, and I ken mair than you do, aye, or Margaret either. There was ane that warned me that I should do my duty to you and speak out. It would be easier for me to hold my tongue. It's aye the

easiest to hold your tongue; but ane that is your friend——"

"I know who that is," cried Isabel, with flashing eyes, "and I think he might have known I could guide myself, and would have no meddling from you!"

"Na, you didna ken who it was," said her step-mother; "it was ane that has kent you all your days; and it's no that he has any cause to be jealous like him you're thinking o'. Eh, that other ane! Poor man! it makes my heart sair to look in his face. A man that might ken better—and no a thought in his head but how to please a lassie's heedless eye."

"There is many a thought in his head," cried Isabel, "I'll not have you speak of my friends. Let me alone. I'm sitting listening if Margaret cries on me, and thinking of nobody. If the best man in the world was there, I would not go to the window to look at him; but don't torment me, or I cannot tell what I may do."

"I'll no be threatened," said Jean, with equal spirit, "and I'll say what's in my heart to say. If you go on with that English lad it'll be to your destruction, Isabel. I was warned to say it, and I'll say it—like it or not, as you please. When I have a burden on my mind, it's no you that will stop me. If you take up with the lad at the Manse, the English lad——"

"Mr. Lothian will disapprove," said Isabel, with a toss of her head.

"I've nothing ado with Mr. Lothian," she said. "I'm no speaking from him. You'll rue the day, Isabel. I'm no for putting a lass in a prison and forbidding *her to speak to a man.* *Would* I mind if it was a' in

play? I was ance a young lass mysel. But yon lad, he's in earnest. And if he beguiles you to listen to him, you'll rue the day!"

Isabel had risen to her feet in indignation, and was about to reply, when a faint call from Margaret interrupted the combatants. Probably Jean had raised her voice unduly, though neither of them were aware of it. It was Isabel Margaret called, and "Let her come too," added the invalid. This was how they generally described to each other their father's wife. The two paused abashed, and went in to the little room behind. Margaret had raised herself up on her pillows, and sat erect, with a flush on her cheeks. The excitement of the previous night had not yet died away. Its effect was to give her the feverish beauty which belongs to her complaint. She had her small Bible clasped between her two white, worn hands, as she had been reading it. "Come in," she said, "come in," holding out her hand to Jean, who lingered at the door. Though she was so beautiful in her weakness, it was death that was in Margaret's face.

"I want to speak to you both," she said; "why will ye quarrel, you two, the moment I'm away?"

"We were not quarrelling," said Isabel, turning her back upon her stepmother.

"Na," added Jean, in explanation; "it was nae quarrel. It was me that was speaking. I'm no a lady-born like you; but I'm the Captain's widow, and a woman of experience, and I will not hold my tongue and see a young lass fall into trouble. Margaret, it's no meaning to vex you; but she's aye keeping on a troke and a kindness with that English lad."

Isabel turned round with hasty wrath and flushed

cheeks; but her resentment was useless. She caught her sister's eye, to whom she could never make any false pretences; and suddenly bent down her head, and hid her face. To Margaret she had no defence to make, even though at this moment she was without blame.

"Then it is him I hear on the hill," said Margaret. "Isabel, go and bring him in to speak to me?"

"Bring him in—here?" asked both the bystanders in a breath, aghast at the command. The amazement of their tone, and the glance they cast round the little room, brought a slight additional colour to Margaret's cheek.

"Bring him here," she repeated; "I've gone so far on my way that I'm free to do what I please. I cannot seek him out or stop him on the road. Isabel, go and bring him into me."

Isabel, who had grown suddenly pale and begun to tremble, hesitated to obey. "O my Maggie!" she said, clasping her hands; and in her desperation she turned to her stepmother with an appealing glance. Jean was at her wits' end, divided between lively dislike and repugnance to "the English lad," and that absolute reverence for Margaret which made it difficult to resist any of her wishes.

"He's no worthy," she said, with trembling eagerness; "he's no fit to come into this chamber and speak face to face with the like of you. Let me gang and speak to him. We mustna be ower anxious; he's but coortin' like the other lads. It's no as if him and Isabel had given each other their troth. It's but a diversion, like a' the rest. I'll speak to him canny, and *send him away.*"

"It's no diversion," said Isabel, hotly, under her breath. Margaret sat in the abstraction of her weakness between the two who were so warm with life and all its emotions, clasping her little Bible in her hands.

"No," she said, softly; "you mistake Bell. She is not like one of the lasses at Lochhead, to meet him and speak to him for diversion, as you say. It's different. And there's none to guard her but me. You're very good—you've always been good to us both. Don't be angry if she's impatient. She's but young," Margaret went on, with a pathetic smile and her eyes fixed on Jean, who by this time was crying without restraint; "when she knows more of the world, she'll see that you're a good woman and have ever been a help and comfort to her and me. But I am mother and sister and all to Isabel as long as I live; and I'll no live long, and I would like to speak a word to him. Bell, you must dry your eyes and bring the young man to me."

"I'll do what you bid me, if it was to break my heart," said the weeping Isabel.

Margaret made no reply. She knew that Isabel was perfectly sincere, and yet she knew that the flutter in the girl's bosom was not for her sister but her lover. While Isabel stole slowly, reluctantly away, Margaret sat propped among her pillows, watching with soft eyes. She was herself so much beyond the world—so ready to go; so far on her way, as she herself expressed it, that the tumult of feeling in her sister's bosom appeared to her almost like the baby flutterings of *childhood.* But Jean, whose experience was of a dif-

ferent kind, stood looking after the girl with mingled indignation and sympathy.

"It's hard on her," said the stepmother. "You ken an awfu' deal mair than me, Margret; but you dinna see it's hard upon her as I do: though I could never forgive her thinking of anything serious, and you so ill. We maun a' hae our little diversion," Jean added, after a pause. "It's but that. It couldna be marrying and giving in marriage the lass was thinking of, and you so far from well."

"Would it not be more unkind if it was mere diversion?" said Margaret.

"Na," said Jean quickly, "a lass like a bairn must whiles have the play. We're a' the better o't. And Isabel meant nae mair. She's thoughtless whiles, but she has a tender heart. You canna believe she was planning out her life and you lying suffering here?"

"She's so young," said Margaret, though a momentary contraction passed over her face. It was meet that Isabel's life should be planned out before she was left alone in the world. Margaret by this time in the liberality of ending life was ready to consider the merits even of the English lad—much more ready than to believe it was mere amusement, which had led Isabel like the village lasses to meet her lover on the hillside. But the suggestion was a natural one to Jean Campbell. The window of the room was a low lattice looking out upon the heather, and chiefly glazed with the thick old-fashioned glass, with a kind of round eye in every pane, which prevents any sight of things outside. Jean went to it and gazed out, vainly attempting to see what was going on outside, but she could make *out nothing but the dim waving* of the bushes and

rustle of the heather—nothing human was to be seen on the hill.

Isabel for her part went very slowly to the door, and looked up and down the road, to cheat her own conscience into the belief that she was obeying her sister. She took a few steps round the house in the wrong direction to look for the watcher, and went back to the door with a relieved heart, not having seen him. Her heart was not detached from her first love, but she had been much shaken in her belief in him at their last meeting; and though she denied indignantly that it was "diversion," she trembled to bring Stapylton to the length of an interview with Margaret, thereby binding him and herself for ever. So Isabel thought in her simplicity. "It would be as bad as being married," she said to herself; and she had no desire to be married. All that her heart asked could be given by those chance meetings, by the sweet sense of being loved, the charm of the tender secret which was between the two. To go any further at such a moment would have shocked and startled the girl; and what was to be done if she brought him to Margaret, but that the most serious consequences might follow. She was incapable of "diverting herself," as Jean thought, but yet had no inclination to quicken the pace of life, or rush upon facts. Serious existence looked still distant and far off, and Isabel approached it with tender delay, with soft wistfulness and reluctance. It would come to that eventually, no doubt. But why should Horace, why should Margaret, be so impatient now?

Isabel stood at the door, and her flushed face cooled in the evening air, and the beating of her

heart grew less loud; but she could not see her lover on the road. "He must have gone away back, if he was ever there," she said, when she returned to Margaret's room, or "maybe it was but the peeweep on the hill."

"It was nae peeweep," said Jean Campbell, turning round; but she was charitable enough to say no more, when she saw the look of anxiety on Isabel's face.

"If he's gone there is no more to be said," said Margaret; and then she sighed. "It is not because I'm going," she added, with a smile, as it were correcting herself, "but because I would fain put myself in God's place for my bonnie Bell; as if He did not love her more than I can—as if she were not safest with Him!"

And then poor Isabel, full of remorse, bent down her head upon her sister's outstretched hands. Could she trust Margaret, perfect as she was, to see all her thoughts, all the fancies that rose in her mind as God did? Jean Campbell, whose homely mind was free of these complications, withdrew at this point, drying her eyes and shaking her head.

"And she's nae aulder than Isabel!" said the humble stepmother. It was the most pathetic commentary that could have been made.

CHAPTER VIII.

"I WOULD not have thought," said Miss Catherine, looking steadily at young Stapylton, who had gone to *pay her a visit, "that the farming* over the hill was

worth so long study. They must be wearying for you at home."

"There are more things than the farming," said Horace; "there is the grouse, for instance, and it will soon be September. The folks at home have to make up their mind to it. A man is not like a girl."

"The Lord forbid!" said Miss Catherine, "or fathers and mothers would have little comfort of their lives. I hope there's a pleasant young sister to keep them company at home."

"Oh, there are three girls, thank you," said young Stapylton, carelessly, "they are jolly enough. It's against my principles to be always turning up at the Hall. What is the good of being young if one is not to have a little freedom? I suppose I shall settle down some time like my father. It's very respectable and all that, but it's not amusing. Women never can understand a man. You think we should be tied down to all the old cut-and-dry habits like yourselves."

"No," said Miss Catherine, "it is not to be expected we should understand you. We are creatures of a lower class, as is well known. But still you know the very dogs come to a kind of comprehension of their masters. I would think the Hall and the neighbours you have known all your days, and the hunting and such like, would have as many charms as Mr. Lothian and the grouse. It's but a poor sphere for you here."

"Well, I suppose so long as I am content, that is enough," said Horace, with a feeling that he was being laughed at; and then he added, with an attempt at sarcasm, "Besides there are a great many superior

people here; and this movement is very interesting to a student of human nature, you know."

"And what does a student of human nature make of the movement?" said Miss Catherine, grimly, looking at the young fellow with her penetrating grey eyes. He was not the *blasé* young man of the present day, experienced in everything and weary of all. He was not sufficiently polished for the soft sneer and universal derision now current among us, but he was the first rough sketch of that accomplished personage; the fashion had come in, or at least had reached to his level. But it was a rough species of the art, and only good as an essay.

"Well," said Horace, with a certain grandeur, an air which had often imposed upon Isabel, who knew no better, "I suppose it is just one of the ordinary religious swindles. But the simplicity of the people makes it look better than usual, to begin with. And it is only beginning. One can't tell at first what follies such a business may fall into. The woman is mad, I suppose; or else she has taken this way of thrusting herself into notice. She is rather pretty, too. Somebody might be fool enough to marry her, if she was taken up by the better class. As for the men, I suppose they have some motive; ambition to be first among their neighbours, or love of excitement, or something. It is like whisky; and then it don't lead to trouble as whisky does."

Miss Catherine was much opposed to "the movement" herself; but her soul was moved within her by this speech.

"*Do you tell them your opinions* as frankly at the

Glebe?" she said, quietly; and her companion changed colour somewhat at the question.

"Well, you know, the eldest girl is of the same way of thinking," he said. "It is quite natural she should be. She is very ill, and she must come to that, sooner or later; and then they all think it's a chance for her to get better. I don't wonder, in the least, at Margaret. The other—don't know what to think," he added, with a little reluctance; "but, of course, one would not shock the feelings of two girls."

"That's good of you," said Miss Catherine; "and I see the force of what you say. Religion is what we must all come to, sooner or later. It's a very fine way of putting it, and shows a perception of character —But, my young friend, is it right of you to turn your steps night after night towards the Glebe? I am never at my west window in the evening, but I see you with your face that way. They are gentlewomen by the mother's side, and no farther off than fifth cousins from the family at Ardallan; but their father was only a trooper, and they have little siller. Would your father be pleased with such a bride as Isabel for his heir? Not but what she is fit for a duke," said Miss Catherine, warmly, once more fixing her companion with her eye.

"Bride?" said the young man, blushing violently, and gazing at her, surprised; and then, for the first time, his tone changed. "She is sweet enough, and pretty enough, for a queen," he said; and then added —"if that were all!" with a sigh.

"Yes, but it is not all," said Miss Catherine, *somewhat melted*. "There are many things to be taken

into consideration. Old folk and young folk have different notions; and unless your people know what you're doing, Mr. Horace, my advice would be that you should go no more to the Glebe."

"Oh, that's all nonsense!" said Horace, recovering himself. "Things have not gone so far as that. Poor little thing! she wants some amusement; her sister is always ill, and nobody with her but that woman. She is a pretty little thing, and I like to talk to her; and so, it appears, does she to me."

"And that is all?" said Miss Catherine, with a return of the grimness to her face.

"That is all," said Horace, lightly, "we may chatter to each other I hope now and then without going to the last extremity. I know what you are going to say, that there is somebody else ready to step in, and that I am standing in the way of her prospects.—Such prospects!—a man old enough to be her father, with a humdrum Manse to offer her. She ought to do better than that. In short, I am a defence to keep Mr. Lothian off," he added, with a laugh, which his high colour and the contraction of his forehead belied. "Confound the old inquisitor!" he was saying to himself, "what has she to do with it —am I bound to tell her everything?" Miss Catherine's looks grew blacker and blacker as she listened.

"You give a bonnie account of yourself," she said, "if you want nothing but to chatter with her, how dare ye stand between her and an honest man that loves her? When Margaret dies,—and we all know that calamity cannot be long averted,—is it your will, for *the sake of your amusement*, that a bonnie, tender

creature should be left without friend or guide in the world? Yes, I know what you think," said Miss Catherine, growing hot; "you think she's so soft and sweet, that you can play as you please. But mind what I say, you may go too far with Isabel; she is young, and younger than she might be, but she is not of a light nature to be guided by you. If you play her false, be it in one way, be it in another, you'll get your punishment. Now you have heard what I have to say, and you can go on your own way, and take your own course, like all your kind; but you've got warning of what will follow. And now, Mr. Horace Stapylton," said Miss Catherine, rising and making him a stately curtsey, "I am obliged to bid you good day."

Horace started to his feet amazed beyond description, by this dismissal. "I am shocked to have intruded upon you," he said, angrily; "I shall take care never to repeat the infliction."

"That shall be as you please," said Miss Catherine, with another curtsey, and the young man found himself out of the room and out of the house almost before he recovered his consciousness. "Old hag!" he said to himself, "old Scotch cat!—venomous old maid!" as he walked down the avenue. But he was worsted notwithstanding, and felt his defeat.

"She turned me out of the house," he said, afterwards, with artful incaution to Isabel, when despite all that had occurred, he succeeded in meeting her "by accident" on the hill: "and all for your sake. You are getting me into disgrace with everybody. They upbraid me for following you, for taking up your time, *for keeping* others away; and the folk at home write

to ask if I am never coming back. People look glum at me wherever I go for your sake, and you will do nothing for me: I must say it is rather too bad."

"I would do anything for you," said Isabel. "I would not mind what all the world might say. They might gloom at me, and welcome; what would I care? anything but one thing, Horace—and that you know—you see—I could not do."

"Which, of course, is the only thing I want," said the young man, sullenly. "That is always the way with girls."

"And why should you want it so?" said Isabel, eagerly. "We're young, and we can wait. If all your folk were ready and willing, could I leave my Margaret? Horace, you know as well as I do: she has been my comfort a' my days; there is not one like her far or near. If you think, as other folk think, that Ailie is nearer God than our Margaret, oh, it shows how little you know," cried Isabel, with the hot colour rushing over her face; "and could I forsake her that has been like a mother to me? What is love, if it's like that?"

"I don't think you know what love means," said Horace: "it is to give up all for one; it is to forsake father and mother—and your past life—and your prospects, as people call them—and good sense and caution and prudence, and all your Scotch qualities;—that is what love is, Isabel; to think of nobody, and care for nobody, but one; to give all your heart, and not a bit of it. I don't ask you for a bit of it; I want you all—every thought, every feeling. I want you to give up everybody and come to me—to me!" and *here the young man* opened his arms and turned

to her with a look of passion which startled the girl. She made a sudden sidelong step beyond one of the great heather clumps before she answered. The colour changed from red to pale on her face; but she kept her eyes fixed on him, with a look of eagerness and wistfulness, trying to penetrate beneath the surface and see his heart.

"Horace," she said, softly, "you and me are different—a man and a girl are different, I suppose. That is not what it is to me. It is something that makes life better, and stronger, and sweeter. I'm fonder of Margaret, I'm better to the bairns. Don't turn away like that. It is like wine," cried the girl, with light rising in her eyes; "it gives you strength for all you have to do. You're at your work, you're minding your house, you're vexed and wearied and troubled—and lo, you give a glance out at the window, and you see *him* pass, and all your trouble rolls away! That's love to me. When you turn round and give me a smile, it's like wine," cried Isabel once more; "I feel it all about my heart—I go back to my work, and something sings within me. I am neither tired nor troubled more. That's love to me! And the world's bonnier and the sky's brighter," she went on faltering, "Oh, Horace, surely you know what I mean?"

"No, I don't know what you mean," cried the young man, with a kind of brutality. "I never understand your Scotch. If this is the sort of figure I am to cut, making you devote yourself more to Margaret and the bairns, as you call them, I had better take myself off, it would seem. A fellow is not to lose the best days of his life for such a reward as that."

Isabel looked at him with but partial comprehen-

sion; her point of view was more elevated than his, but yet it was limited, like his, to her own side of the question. She looked at his clouded brow and averted face with a woman's first violent effort to enter into a state of feeling which was the antipodes of her own. Slowly it dawned upon her that it might be as just as her own though so different. She clasped her arms round the slender white stem of a young birch-tree, and leant against it, gazing at her lover with dreamy eyes.

"Maybe it's all true," she said, slowly, "both what I think and what you think, Horace. It will break my heart, but I can bear it if that is best. Go away into the world, and please your own folk—and I'll wait for you; I'll wait all my life; I'll wait years and years. Why should you lose your best days for me? Oh, I see well it is neither just nor right; and me that has so little to give! It's a sin to keep you here," she continued, tears, unthought of, dropping from her eyes. "Loch Diarmid comes natural to me, and folk forget —But go, Horace, and think on me sometimes; and my heart will go with you; and if you should ever come back you'll find me waiting here."

"Isabel, this is all folly and nonsense," cried young Stapylton. "What are you crying about? am I talking of going away? It is all very easy to send a fellow off and make a fuss, or to keep him hanging on, and kicking his heels among this confounded heather. Can't you do what I want you instead? it's simple enough. What's the good of living in Scotland if you can't get married how you please? If I were to go away I might never come back. They'd keep fast *hold of me at home, or they'd* pack me off some-

where out of reach; and you would change, and I might change. Who can undertake what would happen? I don't believe in comings back. I should find you Mrs. Somebody or other with half-a-dozen—— Hallo, where are you going now?"

"I'm going home," said Isabel, drying her tears indignantly. "It's late, and I cannot enter into such questions. I am not one to change; but, Mr. Stapylton, if that's your way of thinking it's far best it should all come to an end. I don't want to be married. I will never leave my sister. If you will have an answer yes or no, there's your answer. Never, never, if she should live a dozen years!—and God send she may live a dozen years, and a dozen more to that!" cried Isabel with a sob. "My Margaret, that never has a thought but for me! And to bid me run away and shame the house, and break her heart—and to call it love!" said the girl, with an outburst of tears.

She had come back to the birch and leant her pretty head upon the graceful young tree, which waved its tender branches over her with a curious sympathetic resemblance to her own drooping form, while her lover drew near her slowly, his heart melting, though his temper was still ruffled. He was going to her to take her in his arms, to whisper his final arguments, to woo her with his breath on her cheek. At such a moment it did not occur to the young man to look around him, to guard against interruption; and, perhaps, in the soft twilight he could scarcely have perceived the lonely personage who was winding with a noiseless step among the heather, full of her own thoughts.

The dew was falling among the slender birches,

and on the heather and gorse—the wild gale underfoot filled the air with sweetness, and with this soft perfume came the soft stir of silence, the breath of the great quiet, which gave a musical tone to the atmosphere. The shadows were falling over the loch and the hills; points of view that had been visible one moment were invisible the next; and all at once, up in the blue heavens, stars were revealing themselves, here and there one, like lamps among the clouds. A night to tempt any one to linger in the open air, in the quiet, sweet, soft, darkling, humid twilight, full of the silences and splendours of nature, and unawares moved by some brooding of God. The other figure which, veiled by night, and by abstracting thought, was wandering devious on those hills, thinking little of where she went or whom she met, was in her way a better embodiment of the sentiment of the night than were the agitated lovers. It was Ailie Macfarlane come out to roam at eventide like Isaac. She had a shawl over her head after the primitive fashion common to all nations, her head veiled because of the angels. Sometimes she stumbled among the heather, not remarking whither her foot strayed. The darkling world in which those solemn hills stood up each folded in his twilight mantle, with stars about his head and a forehead wet with dew, was full of God to the inspired maiden. Her eyes were moist, like all the earth, with dew. Her mind was full, not of thought but of a quiet consciousness. The poetry that was love to Isabel was to Ailie God. She was in His presence, His great eyes were upon her, at any moment she might hear His voice calling to her, as Adam heard it in the cool of *the garden. As she strayed* upon the hills alone

with that great trembling, thrilling Nature which was conscious, too, of His presence, the Lord had strayed communing with His Father. He had passed the whole night there, as His servant was not able to do. He had gone down the darkling slopes and set his foot, unaware of the restrictions of nature, upon the gleaming silvery waters below as she could have done on the loch had her faith been but strong enough. "More faith! more faith!" she murmured to herself as she went, "O Lord, increase my faith." Her young soul was burning within her with the cravings which Margaret Diarmid had divined; not soft submission to Him that rules heaven and earth, but eager anticipations, restless energy, a heart full of passion. Joan of Arc might so have strayed on her southern moors; though it was from the yoke of Satan that Ailie longed to deliver her people—from wickedness, and disease, and misery. Why should not she? Had not the Lord promised *whatsoever ye ask?* Had not He granted to all eyes authentic wonders? Was his arm shortened that it could not save? or was there anything wanted but faith, more faith?

The sound of voices roused her from her abstraction, first to a sudden flush of annoyance, and then, as she perceived the two figures before her, to a warm thrill of zeal for their conversion. "The Lord has delivered them into my hand," the enthusiast said to herself. Their backs were turned to her, and their minds so much occupied that even the crackle of the heather under her foot did not betray her approach. She was close by their side, laying a sudden hand upon the shoulder of each before they were even aware of her presence.

here?" said Ailie, rising as it seemed
most out of the darkness. The two
gazed at the intruder, but Ailie was
ll by her office to heed their looks.
! she repeated with solemnity, "what

nothing," said Isabel, startled back
s: "I might say what were you doing
like a ghost?"
a spirit," said Ailie, "it's like that I
What is this poor body that we should
f I had faith I might fly upon angel's
I'm feared it was not to serve the
ro came here. Na, stand apart, and
an ye see a' this world round about
that you're immortal? Isabel, the
have ye to be His servant—and you

I'm no like you," murmured Isabel,
first self-assertion. As for Stapylton,
with contemptuous impatience.
she know about it?" he said. "Isa-
ive in to this rubbish. Nobody has
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s." This was said in a low tone.
ou home. It is getting late," he said,

Ailie, "it's getting late, awfu' late.
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es to Him now. But I'm no thinking

of worldly wisdom. To stand up for Him in a dark world; to go forth like the angels, and make the way clear; to love and to bless, and to give life for death. O Isabel! O young man! I would rather that than heaven."

Ailie, with her young face gleaming white in the twilight, her nervous arm raised, her abstracted, humid eyes gazing into the vacant darkness, was a creature whose influence it was hard to be altogether indifferent to. Stapylton, though he was capable of laughter at this exhibition ten minutes after, was, at least, silenced for the moment. He looked at her with that curious stupidity, in which the ordinary mind loses its faculties at the sight of such incomprehensible poetic exaltation. But Isabel, already excited, gazed upon the young prophetess with the big tears still standing in her eyes, drawn by one emotion more closely within the reach of another than she had yet been.

"I am not standing against Him! Oh, Ailie, dinna think it! Not for the world!" she cried, dropping those two great tears; and nature gave a little gasp and sob within her. To go forth with God's servants on this austere road, or to wander with her love in the primrose paths.—If there was a choice to be made, could any one doubt for a moment which would be the right choice? But Isabel felt herself so different from this inspired creature, so different even from Margaret, so much slighter, younger, more trifling, fond of praise and admiration, and amusement; not able to give her mind to it. And yet she was the same age as Margaret, and very little younger than Ailie. "I am not like you," she added, with an exquisite sense of her own imperfection, which brought other tears from those

same sources. And then the feminine impulse of excuse came upon her: "We were meaning nothing," she said, hurriedly and humbly. "I met Mr. Stapylton here on the hill. And it's a bonnie night. You were walking yourself, Ailie. And I'm going home. It was no harm."

"Oh, Isabel, ye never mind how you weary the Lord with your contradictions," said the prophetess. "I canna see your heart like Him; but do you think I canna see what's moved ye? No the bonnie night, nor the bonnie hill, nor His presence that's brooding over a' the world; but a lad that says he loves you, Isabel. There's nae true love that's no in Christ. If he's true, let him come to the Lord with ye this moment, afore this blessed hour is gane. Eh, my heart's troubled," she cried, suddenly raising her arms; "my heart's sore for you. If he comes not now, when the Lord is holding wide the door, it's that he'll never come; and then there is nothing for you but tribulation and sorrow, and lamentation and woe!"

Her voice sank as suddenly as it had risen. She pressed her hands upon her eyes, with what seemed, to the terrified Isabel, the gesture of one who shuts out something terrible from her vision.

"It is the spirit that's upon her," Isabel murmured to herself, shivering. "Oh, Ailie, dinna lay any curse on us, that never did you harm!"

"Curse!" she said, so low that they could scarcely hear her. "It's no for me to curse. He had no curses in His mind, and wherefore should I? It was a cloud that passed. Isabel, bring yon lad to God, bring him to God! or he'll bring you to misery, and trouble, and pain. *I am saying the truth.* It's borne in on me

that he'll bring you to awfu' trouble. But if he comes to the Lord, ye'll break Satan's spell."

Stapylton had turned aside in impatience, and heard nothing of this; but now he came forward and laid his hand on Isabel's arm.

"Your sister will want you," he said, almost roughly; "it is getting late, and this is not the place for a prayer-meeting; let me take you home."

"Oh, Ailie, I must go home to my Margaret," said Isabel, clasping her hands. Nature was contending, with natural awe and reverence, in the girl's mind. She did not reject the authority of the holy maid for one moment—she was ready to yield to its power; but as soon as the possibility of escape became visible to her, she seized it anxiously. "She'll be waiting and watching for me; and you know how ill she is, and I must not keep her anxious," pleaded Isabel; "but I'll think upon all you say."

"Ay, gang your ways, gang your ways," said Ailie, turning her back upon them and dismissing them with a wave of her hand. "Put it off to a convenient season; wait till you're hardened in your worldly thoughts, and the Lord has shut-to the door; but dinna come then and say, Give us of your oil, for there will be nane to give in that day—nane to give! The market's open the noo, and plenty to fill your vessels; but in that day there will be nane. Gang your ways to Margret, and tell her she's but a faint heart, that will lie down and die, when the Lord has that need of her for His work. I'm no saying she's not a child of God, but she has a faint heart. Gang your ways."

"If you knew my Margaret better, ye would never dare to speak like this," said Isabel, flushing into op-

on drew her hand into his arm, and

he said, "come while she has turned
no more sermons for my part. Your
Isabel—come! this is too much for

l herself to be led across the heather,
her excitement, of the close pressure
over held her hand. She was angry
ce. "Nobody understands," she mur-
"Nobody knows what they're say-
lamed that is the flower of all!" and
notwithstanding Stapylton's opposition,
sister's cause against her rival. But
away. She was going back, moving
heather, with her head bent and her
reaming after her fashion, though not
of Isabel. Ailie was thinking—with
f images and vagueness of apprehen-
e exalted glow of ascetic passion—of
Poor Isabel was trembling with all
, the duties, and desires going con-
1 other which adhere to the love of

e must be mad," said Stapylton; "no-
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u that know nothing of Ailie, nor of
g. If you were healed all in a mo-
out of your bed, who would you be-

lieve did it but God? and could you stop to think and consider the question if you were mad or not, before you spoke? Let them judge that know!"

"Never mind," said the young man, caressing the hand he held, "you little fury! I don't know and I don't care; but you never thanked me for reminding you of your sister, and freeing you from that mad creature. Now she is gone there is no hurry, Isabel. It is not late, after all."

"But Margaret will want me," said the girl. "No; I'll not wait, I must go home."

"Only half an hour," he pleaded; "she is gone, and we have all the hill-side to ourselves."

Isabel made no answer, but she drew her hand from his arm, and continued on her way, quickening rather than delaying her progress. He walked by her for some time, sullen and lowering. He had no comprehension of the high spirit of the girl, though he loved her. After a while he drew closer to her side, and laid his hand on her arm.

"You must do as I said, my darling, now," he said, with real fervour. "She is going back to her meeting, and it will be all over the parish to-morrow, that you and I were courting on the hill."

This was the drop too much that made Isabel's cup run over. She turned upon him with eyes that flashed through her tears. "Do you reproach me with it?" she cried—"you I did it for? Oh, if I had known! But, Mr. Stapylton, it shall be the last time."

"Don't turn my words against me," he said, "don't be so peevish, so foolish, Isabel! as if it was that I meant."

"No, I'll not be foolish," she answered, in her

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her quiet home, and Horace pro-
village, each with the blaze of a
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the hill.

CHAPTER IX.

ras still astir and awake when young
. it, rounding the darkling margin of
arly summer was over by this time,
parted those lingering silvery evening-
so sweet in Scotland. The days had
shorten, and real darkness to take
ht. The water rippled upon the beach
and gurgle among the gravel, and
nse of companionship to the solitary
lights glimmered in the cottage win-
gleams of red firelight, sometimes the
a lamp, half revealing the children

about the hearth, or the mother making the porridge. People still stood at their doors, talking to each other across the street, in their unreserved tones, from which the soft evening air took all harshness. In the distance, raised on its height, the lamp was shining from the open window of the Manse parlour. Now and then one of the voices would cease, and a cottage door be shut, and silence fall upon one spot in the homely darkling scene. Sometimes the air would be started with a loud call for Johnnie or Jenny, from the group of children who still played before the doors. The children, too, contributed their share to the effect of the picture. They were playing at one of the musical games so common in Scotland, advancing and retiring, and going round in a ring with soft, monotonous chant. The drama was the mystic one which narrates the illness and death and alarming resurrection of "Janet-joe;" and the little ones answered each other in fresh clear voices, through which the talk of the mothers at the doors went on undisturbed. In the darkness it was scarcely possible to distinguish the speakers; but this was how the public conversation went on.

"Your man's no hame yet, Jenny Spence?" "Na, he's no hame, and I've nae peace o' my mind since that weary public has been opened on the road to Kilcranion. It's awfu' hard on the men. Weariet and fasting, puir fellows, and Luckie Bisset at the door aye tempting them with a dram." "I wonder how any Christian woman can set up sic a trade," cried another half-visible interlocutor, "and her ain man that drank himsel' to death, as a' the loch kens." "But there maun be refreshment for travellers, neebors," said another, "or what would become of thae English that are

aye tramping about among the hills?" "They might stay at hame, and a' the better, instead o' coming and glowering at honest folk, like as if we were savages." "Rather half-a-score Englishmen starve than a decent man be led away to his ruin," cried another indignant commentator. "But if the minister was what he should be, it would never have been allow't." "I'm thinking it's the factor that's most to blame; it's onything for siller with thae worldly men." "But eh, if the minister was the man he should be, there would be less worldliness in the parish. He's an awfu' Laodicean in his ways, for a' the grace that's come to this place." "I ken nothing about your Laodiceans," said Jenny Spence. "The minister kens better than you or me—but he's no that clever to keep the factor frae a good tenant, nor Luckie Bisset frae a customer, nor my John frae a dram. It's my opinion we'll a' have to hing by our own heads, as the saying is, and the minister can answer for himself." "My Jean is gaun to her new place the morn," said another neighbour, opening a new subject, "I maun away and see after her claes. It's an awfu' thocht to send a young lass away into the world." "But she's a good lass, and has aye had a good example set before her, and it's no that far but you can see her whiles," said the optimist. "You may well say it's an awfu' thocht," said, with a sigh, the assailant of the minister, "when ye think of Sawtan going about like a roaring lion; no to speak of a' the lads about a farm-toun that are worse than Sawtan himself." "I say it aye depends on the lass," Jenny interposed, who spoke with authority, being well connected, and a person of weight and discretion. "If it's a light-headed *thing that runs after the lads*, or if it's a dowie thing

that yields to them—but a spirity lass like Jean, tha kens her ain value, is as safe one place as anither And eh bless me! if there's no our John and the car coming down the brae—and me misdoubting him a this time!"

The conversation here paused, and the chant of th children at their game, and the gurgle and plash o the rising water, and the rumble of the home-coming cart, took up the vacancy. The little figures move indistinctly in the gloom; the man and the cart loome like great shadows at the turn of the road; and her and there a door was shut, and the woman who ha been but half visible while she stood there talking passed across the lighted window inside, sitting dow to her evening task of mending, or darning, or porridge making. To all this homely village life the stranger who was passing through it gave no attention. Th human fellowship of the women at their thresholds, th shutting of those humble doors upon the individuality within, a separation not severe enough to secure eve a blind at the lighted window, made no impression o young Stapylton. He heard the chatter as he passed and felt the mothers and the children to be as vulga and uninteresting as the palings of their little gardens or the stones in the irregular street. John, rumblin slowly on, seated on the edge of his cart, gave him th proverbial rural salutation, "It's a fine nicht," witho eliciting any further reply than a surly nod. Th young fellow had neither life nor heart for the littl community around him.

There was, however, a point on the road at whic he paused and turned aside. To return to Mr. Lothia

while the night was still so young was anything but desirable. The minister was not a congenial companion; and though the young man, half in despite to plague his rival with his presence, and half in selfish consideration of his own comfort, obstinately remained at the Manse, an evening spent in his host's society was more than he was equal to. The turn he took led to a village centre, where, to tell the truth, Stapylton was no favourite; but he had too much self-estimation to be aware of that. The Marquis, the tutelary genius of the district, had forbidden the establishment of any place of entertainment in his dominions, a step not unusual with highland potentates; and but for Luckie Bisset's little public-house over the hill, which existed under the pretext of travellers, and was too far off to tempt the villagers, there was no place of social meeting for its worthies. One of the resources upon which the fathers of the hamlet fell back to supply the want was the smithy where John Macwhirter, laborious and money-making, worked after everybody else was in bed. Perhaps even John prolonged his day's work out of regard to the little assembly which was wont to gather round the glow of his fire. Even in August a fire is not unpleasant to behold on Loch Diarmid. When the hill was sodden, and the paths running with rain —as happened so often—there was a sensible comfort in its red glimmer; and even on such a night as this, when everything breathed balm and peacefulness, a clear night after a bright day, the ruddy glare which lighted out from the open door into the gloom of the night was pleasant to behold. The company within was of the usual kind. John the smith himself, with his *sleeves rolled up on his strong* arms, was cleaning

and fitting together some part of the new threshing machine which was to be put up at Miss Catherine' farm in a day or two; but behind him his journeyma was labouring at the anvil as became a smith, with th furnace roaring, and the hammer sounding, and re sparks flying about. One of the visitors, a tall mar with a tall hat over his eyes, sat astride and absorbed with his hands in his pockets, on a disused anvi This was Andrew White, the miller, an elder, and ma of weight in the parish. Peter Chalmers, the genera "merchant," or shopkeeper of the village, stood by th smith, with curious eyes bent upon his work. It wa old Sandy of the Langholm that stood close into th ruddy corner, holding out his hands, though at a re spectful distance, to the blaze, and a little afraid o the sparks. William of Wallacebrae, who was also a elder, and often called Mr. William, in acknowledg ment of the respect due to his character, made up th party. These last who had but Christian names t distinguish them, were all Diarmids like the rest of th parish. A step or two aside, in the heat of conversa tion, would now and then make one of the interlocu tors disappear into the gloom; and, on the other hand a sudden puff of the bellows and blazing up of the fir would flash over walls and roof and into all the corner showing everything animate and inanimate as by flash of lightning; and there would sometimes occur momentary silence, when the company was thinking but these interruptions were few, and the talk flowe on in a very steady stream.

"Ay, it's a newfangled machine in thir parts," sai John, "but no in Fife, or the Carse, where there's fin farming. And it's a beautiful principle. If you pa

attention you'll soon see how the wheels act, one within anither like maist things——"

"I'm no for those new inventions," said Sandy of Langholm; "they cost a heap of siller, and a poor man cannot get them. In the auld way ye were a kind o' equal wi' your neebor till the corn was selt, or till it was eaten. The same seed, and the same sun, and a dibble and a plough, and a good hook and an Irish shearer to take it in hand. But whenever ye come in wi' your steam and machinery, I kenna when you'll stop. Ye'll shear the corn by steam, or a's done." This Sandy said, with a short laugh, as a monstrous assertion, the wildest flight of fancy—all unconscious of the reaping-machine which has lately begun its unnatural rounds on his own fields.

"I'm no satisfied in my mind that it's according to Scripture," said Andrew White. "Mony's the grand passage that will be dark to us if these inventions carry the day: 'Whose flail is in his hand, and he will thoroughly purge his floor.' Take up your machinery for everything, and who would ken the meaning o' that?"

"I dunna mind when I've seen a flail," said Mr. William, "except whiles in the far Hielands, when I was buying cattle. It's little corn they grow puir bodies, and time's nae object to them. They grind their corn in the quern thereabout, which is awfu' scriptural; but I warrant, Andrew, you wouldna go the length o' that."

"And wherefore no if it put the truth afore a' your minds?" said Andrew, *hoisting* himself on his *anvil, as if it had been a horse*; "but it's easier for a

camel to gang through the eye of a needle than for some folk to see the truth."

"I wish we had less o' the truth and minded it mair," said John the smith; "I'm weariet o' all this speaking. There's naebody about this place in his right senses but me—and maybe the minister; and the wife herself is corruptit like the rest and has nae faith in her natural guide. Ye laugh, but it's no laughing matter. Here's the parish in the hands of a wheen women and silly lads—wi' a prayer-meeting for a parliament to make laws for us a' that might be their grandfathers. I canna thole't for ever."

"But ye maun even thole't and bow your proud neck, like a young heifer," said the miller, "if it's the Lord's will."

"No me," said John, "a wheen weans! I'd give them a big barn and a fiddle, and auld Johnny Carter from the Rue to learn them the new-fashioned quadrilles. It would suit them better than their prayer-meetings. I was aye one for nature, say what you like."

"Whisht! we maunna speak," said Peter Chalmers, "if it was to last, a man might make a stir; but hooly and fairly gangs a lang way. It'll no last; as long as that dour auld Whig's there, spying everything, if I was you John, my man, I wouldn't waste my breath."

"Ye were aye a temporizer," said John aloud, for the merchant's advice had been given in an undertone. "And I wouldna say but what it's natural wi' little Tam set up down the lochside in your ain trade to wile away your customers; but it's grand to have a monopoly, and a man daur speak his mind. When ye hae the consciousness in your breast that there's no

another smiddy nearer nor the Rue, and horses maun be shod and ploughs kept in fettle, it gies you an awfu' sense of independence; and I'm saying I'm no for these new-fangled ways. Let the lasses bide at hame and mind their mithers that have mair sense, or what's the good o' years? I'm fond o' young folk in their ain place—but that's no to be guides to me that kent what was what afore they were born. I'm no for asking questions in a kind of a public place like this, but we a' ken you've been up to the session-meeting, Andrew, and if there was any decision I wouldna say but I would be glad to hear."

"There's been nae decision," said Andrew concisely.

"We werena a quorum," explained Mr. William, with more urbanity, "or rather, we were just a quorum, and the minister and me being mostly ae way o' thinking it wouldna have been fair to the rest. So the meeting's adjourned till the morn's nicht; but I canna hope anything will come of it. They're awful sure they're right, and we're far from sure they're wrang; and it's easy to see in sic a case wha's like to prevail."

"There's an awfu' deal to be said on both sides," said Peter Chalmers; "the auld ways are, maybe, safest, but the new ways are real steering. And it canna be denied that there's mair interest in a'thing connected wi' the kirk; though them that's given to scoffing while gets a handle."

"I would like to ken," said old Sandy, interrupting, "what's the use o' thae unknown tongues. There's just as much sense to be made of a cow's bellow or *the auld stot in the field—mair*, I would say; for she's

wanting hame to the byre. I'm no ain that sits in the seat of the scorner; but I would like to ken, what does't mean."

"It means what it meant in the auld days," said Andrew White; "it's the voice o' the Lord in power. Ye mayna understand wi' your understanding; but what's o' that? Is the mind o' man sae high and grand that it perceives a' things? Do ye ken the meaning o' the wind when it's gaun howling and roaring over the hills? Say there's nae meaning till't, and what then? It is the voice of the Lord. If it gars ye shake with fear o' His awfu' coming, or fills ye full of wonder and trembling like the thunder, is that no enough? And maybe, if we but kent," he added, with a change of his voice, "there's some poor creatures somewhere away in the ends o' the earth, that would understand every word, and hear and live."

"Then there's just the question why it was sent to us and no to them," said the smith. "You've a queer notion of the Lord, you awfu' guid-folk, as if He had a' His tools in a confusion, and never knew which ane to grip to for its right work. As if I was to take the muckle hammer to thae bits of wheels. For my part I canna but think He maun be mair wark-like and ken what he's doing. But as long as the Session's come to nae decision, we'll suspend our judgment. It's gey and dreary though for them that's no o' your way o' thinking—take mysel for example. I gang hame wearied after my day's work; and the wife, she's away at a prayer-meeting. When she comes in I'm gaun to my bed, and maybe no in the best o' tempers; and then there's nought for me but a' the prayers and the discourses at second hand; and 'Eh but Ailie w

grand in this;' and 'Eh but Mr. John was like ane of the apostles.' 'Saul among the prophets,' is what I say. Set him up for a preacher! The fac is, either the women-folk are awfu' gomerils, or they're mair innocent than a man can divine."

"I dinna believe in their innocence for ane," said Peter Chalmers.

"Nor I," said young Stapylton, who had come in to the group unseen.

"Nor you, laddie?" said Mr. William; "it's no an argument for you to put in your hand to. You're a stranger and a callant, and no used to our ways. And if ye were the lad ye should be, ye would mind your mother and think shame——"

"I'm not so young that I don't know other women besides my mother," Horace retorted, hotly; "and if you ask me to believe——"

"I ask ye to believe nothing, lad," said the elder, severely. "And, Andrew, you and me have naething to do wi' this wild talk. John Macwhirter's a decent man, but he hasna that regard for the elders of the pairish that's becoming, or he wouldna let loose his tongue upon you and me."

"I claim naething as an elder o' the pairish," said Andrew, rising. "We're a' miserable sinners. I'm willing to learn frae the humblest for my part, but it behoves us a' to consider what we say when ye think that for every idle word there's an awfu' account coming. Gang to the prayer-meeting with your wife, John, if ye'll take my advice; and hardened as ye are, grace may come your way. There's naething so free *as grace; it comes to them* that's least deserving,

without money or price; and wherefore should it no come even to you?"

"My faith, but yon's impudence!" cried the astonished smith, when the two spiritual rulers of the parish left the smithy. "I'm no bragging o' mysel. I'm sinner enough, God knows; but if I'm the least deserving, and Black John o' Ardnamore's a chosen vessel it's awfu' queer to me."

"That's hame, lad," said Peter, with malicious laughter. "I'm fond o' a guid shot; and you're a roaring, ranting unbeliever, that's what ye are."

"Better that than a roarin', rantin' believer, that makes the like o' you scoff at a' things guid," retorted John. "I have my ain views—but afore I'd sneevel in my sleeve like you, and gang with first ane and then anither, and mak a scoff at a', I'd sooner low at a stake wi' Ailie Macfarlane setting light to the faggots; and I wouldna say but that's what we'll see yet afore a's ower."

"Na, na," said old Sandy; "dinna be sae fierce: she'll never light faggot, yon lass. If it's no the grace o' God I canna tell what it is. She's mair like to gang to the stake, John Macwhirter, than the like o' you."

"I'll gie ye the explanation o' it in a jiffy," said John. "She's been brought up in an awfu' strict family. Nae laughing allowed yonder, Peter, nor naething natural. I'll give ye my word the poor lass never danced a reel in her days. But she's Eve's dochter like a' the rest; and commotion o' some kind the creature must have. I'm no blaming her. If I *was* shut up in ane o' yon doleful houses, I'd jump *out the window* and break my leg or my neck, but I'd

be doing; and sae it's seen by her. Keep a lass frae a' that's in nature, and she'll take to what's out of nature, poor thing. A young creature must have stir and excitement; that's my explanation. Ony man can tell how it's begun; but nae man, that I ken of, can prophesy what will be the end."

"Weel, aweel," said Peter, "if it was auld Johnny Carter and his fiddle that was put in competition the lasses mightn't be that ill-pleased."

"I'd join for one, with all my heart," cried Stapylton. "It would be fun to set all the little Presbyterians jigging;" and he ventured to laugh, which drew upon him the smith's glowing eye.

"You're a braw lad to talk 'o' the little Presbyterians," he said, "but I wouldna advise you, my man, though you set up for a gentleman, to make or meddle with them. We're awfu' clannish on this loch; and if a bonnie lass happens to have nae father to take her part, we're a' her fathers for the occasion. It would be the worst day's work ye ever did in your life to put a slight on any here."

"You are very impudent, my fine fellow," said Stapylton. "Do you think I am going to take advice from you?"

"You'll take what you canna avoid," said John; "and ye needna think to daunton me. The Manse is a protection, but it 'll no serve you in sic a case. I'm naming no names; and if I were you, I'd gang hame to my anxious friends, and no push in where you arena wanted. Peter, the wife will be waitin' for you at hame; and a doited body ye are, aye stravaghin'. I'm thinking of shutting up the *smiddy* at better hours."

"*I hope no afore the work's done*," said old Sandy,

who, sheltering his eyes with his hands, looked anxiously on at the progress of the journeyman, who had been working at a cart-wheel which was Sandy's property, and which he awaited in order to get home.

"It'll no be done this half-hour yet, and a dark ride ye'll have o't ower the hills," said John. "Come your ways in wi' me, and we'll see if there's a dram left in the greybeard. That's ae advantage of thae prayer-meetings. She canna tak' count o' every tumbler when she's out on her ain jollifications. Come your ways ben, and Tam will cry on us when the work's done. I would like to hae't out with that English lad," he went on as they left the smithy. "I wouldna trust him, no with a dog, let alane a lass; and he's after nae good, aye biding on here. Ye may say what you like, Peter, wi' your scoffing tongue; but either the women are awfu' innocent, mair than a man can believe, or else they're downright fuils."

"That last was aye my opinion," said sceptic Peter.

"Or maybe a wee o' baith," said old Sandy. "I've lasses o' my ain, and I ought to ken; they're awfu' innocent, as you say, till ance it's put into their heads; and then there's heaps o' them that are fuils," Sandy added with a sigh; "but no a'."

The two others went into the house with him without a word. The old man was not without occasion for that sigh. Shame and humiliation such as was, alas! not quite rare in the country-side, had visited his house; but it was an old story, and the other speakers had forgotten it. It did not even weigh so heavy on Sandy's own mind as to prevent him from being very comfortable over his toddy, and setting off afterwards *through* the darkness with his wheel mended, rumbling

the lonely road with a sufficiently

ton, he left the smithy with very
, half disgusted even with his love,
ion thus entitled every clown in the
im an interest in her. He had quar-
, which, of course, gave force to his
e speculated, half consciously to him-
ls "at home" whom the Squire's son
me of them were as pretty as Isabel;
nd Isabel had but a pittance; all had
s, and some sort of pedigree. Fancy
mith at home venturing to interfere!

They might be as clannish as they
cel of Scotch curs. What were they
s so unsympathetic with all around
like a foreigner in a strange country
e hill, though he had ascended by that
day for six months. By this time
were shut. From one cottage as he
d of a monotonous psalm, the even-
prayer, came somewhat mournfully.
a doleful sound; and a little further
stood on the threshold of his house
ing pipe. "It's a fine night," he said,
d. And then the young man came
of the school-house just opposite the
the prayer-meeting was being held.
ound of one voice in passionate tones;
id rustle of movement; then the same
logue recommenced. A certain hum,
ame through the open window. "Oh,
t it again," the Dominie said slowly.

As for Horace, he laughed to himself with a certain contempt as he went on. If they thought they were to control *him*, to make him a slave to their caprice, to interfere with his amusements or plans, whatever they might be, they were mightily mistaken. Stapylton went home with that curious sense of universal dislike and misappreciation which brings out all the obstinate self-conceit of an inferior mind. "I will show them their mistake," was what Horace was saying to himself as he went past. About himself he saw nothing to be mended. It was the outer world that was in the wrong; and it was an inferior, Scotch world—a narrow, prejudiced, psalm-singing, vulgar, little community, unaware of the superior dignity of the Squire's son. Thoughts of going off instantly and marrying one of the girls he had bethought himself of, and coming back in a postchaise to dazzle the scorners, arose in his mind —to dazzle Isabel Diarmid most of all, who was not so proud of his regard as it became her to be. Thus he went angrily to the Manse, feeling that he had nothing in common with anyone near him, untouched by the peacefulness of the night or the soft hum of tranquil life which he had left behind.

CHAPTER X.

THE Manse of Lochhead was not a venerable, nor a beautiful house. It had none of the associations which sometimes cluster about an English parsonage. It had not been built above twenty years, and neither its dimensions nor its appearance were in the least manorial. But it was a comfortable square house, quite

the owner's wants and income, and
to represent the dignity of the min-
humble roofs of the village. It was
of the braes which rose heathery and
l the prospect from its windows was
ıre had been no mountains within a
The unequal combination of the great
ɔn one side, with the pastoral loch on
gave a charm to the Glebe Cottage,
-lower elevation. Here there was no-
Diarmid with its soft banks, scattered
s, divided into a thousand tints, with
ɒod, and yellowing corn, and green
ɹurple heather. When the day was
varieties of colour would be reproduced
ɾater, with magic precision, and the
l with the softest, rural, pastoral, in-
ut it missed the subliming touch of the
ehind, the mountain ridge with all its
ur and shadow. The church, a homely
ɒlong barn lighted by long windows,
ɹwer attached to it to make it hideous;
which was a barn without a tower,
ɔposite the gate of the Manse garden,
le of the road. The Dominie's house
lower down. Thus religion and learn-
her, very homely, very unpretending,
ıout a dignity which everybody acknow-
was a natural connexion between them,
lreamed of gainsaying; and if perhaps
tain gleam of contempt might cross the
ɪtical community for the follies of flower-
butterfly-hunting, by which the two

members of the Guild of Education were said to be distinguished, this kindly sense of superiority did not lessen the respect awarded to them "in their ain line." When the minister and the Dominie were discovered with their great telescope erected on the road between their houses, or in the Manse garden, no such contempt attended their proceedings; the country-side, including Miss Catherine, looked on well pleased, feeling that star-gazing was a pursuit worthy of their leaders—and proud of the science which threw a reflected lustre upon themselves. Mr. Galbraith was six or seven years older than the minister, who, himself was about fifty. Mr. Lothian was the successful man of the two, having attained all he had aimed at in his professional existence. The Dominie had broken down in that highest aim. But still they had gone through the same training, and belonged to the same class. Such cases are very rare in Scotland now; they were rare indeed, even then. But the combination was of great importance to the two most closely concerned; and gave a certain rank to the parish of which it was very conscious, though it could not refuse itself by times the privilege of a smile.

The minister and the Dominie had dined together on the afternoon preceding the adjourned meeting of the Kirk Session, partly because it was habitual on the Saturday half-holiday, and partly to strengthen each other for the work before them. The hour of their dinner was four o'clock, which was as if you had said aight o'clock to that primitive community. When the meal was over they adjourned to the study to smoke the quiet pipe which was one of their bonds of union. The study was a small room with one window looking into a vast rose-bush, though peeps of the trim kitchen

garden were to be had on one side. The rose-bush hung heavy with great blobs of rain that glittered in the late reluctant glimmer of the setting sun, for it had been raining all day. One great blazing full-blown rose of the second blowing caught the light like a jewel; and all that could be seen besides was the glistening of the green leaves, and great diamond rain-drops. The study itself was full of books, in rude shelves not much more elegant than those of the Dominie. It had a number of little prints in black frames hung anyhow upon so much wall as was free from books—symmetry in such matters evidently not having occurred to the minister as desirable. Under the wall on which the prints were hanging stood an old writing-table, covered with papers. The window was open, and a faint little breeze rustled the papers inside, and now and then playfully discharged a raindrop from the rose-leaves upon the two friends. You would have supposed that it would be natural for two such men to prefer the other side of the house, where the loch was visible, changing to a hundred opal tints as the shadows pursued the fleeting uncertain sunshine off its bosom. But they were very familiar with the view, and the little study at the back was the legitimate place for the pipe and the consultation.

"I am always afraid of these violent men," said the minister, "and then they are so much in earnest. Earnestness is a fine quality, no doubt, but it's very hard to keep it in bounds; and I cannot let things go on as they are doing. They 'll soon take the very work out of my hands. Already it is not me but Ailie that's at the head *of the parish.* And you tell me you'll *give me no help?*"

"It's against my principles," said the Dominie. "Let alone, that's aye my rule. I'm no for meddling with the development of the mind whatever form it takes. You may say it's a childish way to take up religion; but so far as it's gone there's no harm."

"No harm! after what I told you of that scene at the Glebe, and the reprobate turned prophet," said Mr. Lothian, angrily.

"You're very sensitive about the Glebe. If it had been any other house in the parish it would not have gone so much to your heart."

"Well," said Mr. Lothian, "if I am, is it not natural? Two young creatures, so strangely situated, neither ladies, so to speak, nor simple lasses, though ladies in their hearts. And then that saint there is more like heaven than earth. You need not smile. I do not disguise my feeling for her sister. It's a mad notion for a man of my years, but I don't disguise it. And yet it was of Margaret I thought."

"By all I hear," said the Dominie, "she'll soon be out of all risk of disturbance."

"You speak at your ease," said the minister, rising in agitation to pace about the little room. "When Margaret Diarmid dies it will be like the quenching of a light to me, and more than me. And how can I protect her deathbed but by putting a stop to this? Her deathbed, aye, or her very grave. Have you forgot that they go further and further every day?"

"I heard they were raising the dead," said the Dominie, calmly. "It's the sense o' power that leads them away."

"And they *have* power," said the minister, "that is the strangest of all. Wherever it comes from, from

God or the devil, they have power in their hands. I cannot deny it—I cannot understand it. Are we to believe what we see in contradiction of every instinct, or are we to hold by reason and common sense, and the truth we understand, and give facts the lie? The thought is too much for me."

"And so you would put a stop to it?" the Dominie said, with a long puff of smoke. "But ye'll have discussion enough before that's done. I'm more concerned for the two poor things at the Glebe. If Margaret dies, as she must die, what is to become of bonnie Isabel?"

The minister, though he was a man of vigorous frame, gave a momentary shiver, as if the cold had seized him, and then sat down again, and began to turn over his papers, averting his face. "You know what would become of her," he said, "if I had my will."

"You would bring the lassie down here to be mistress and mair," said Galbraith. "I'm no blaming you, though I cannot understand it myself. You and me are more wiselike companions than her and you could ever be. If you had married in your youth, like most men, ye might have had a daughter of your own as old as she is now."

"I've said all that to myself," said the minister, "a hundred times over. But it makes no difference. And I can bear whatever may happen—but my heart craves this thing from the Lord, and no other, before I die."

"You're taking up their very phraseology, for all your objections to them," said the Dominie, with a little *disdain.*

"It's the phraseology of all that yearn," cried the minister. "Why should I not ask it of the Lord? It's a lawful thing I crave. God do so to me and more also if I would not cherish her like Christ His Church. I am old enough to be her father, as you say; but I never loved woman till now, and that is the youth of the heart. The boy there is fond of her in his way—but what sort of a way? a fancy of the moment for her sweet face. And you'll say it's more natural. But I tell you, Galbraith, there is no nature in it," he said, once more rising in his excitement, "to link that creature's pure soul to a hardened, heathen, self-seeking man of the world. I know the lad; he is near her in age, but in nothing else. She makes a God of him in her imagination; and when her eyes were opened, and she saw the loathly creature by her side, what would become of my Isabel? She would break her heart, and she would die."

"Her eyes might never be opened," said the Dominie, reflectively. "There's no bounds to a woman's power of deceiving herself. She might make a hero of him all her days, though he was but a demon to the rest of the world. And the lad is maybe not so ill as ye say."

"That would be worst of all—for then he would drag her down to his level, and blind her eyes to good and evil. No more," said the minister, with a trembling voice; "you mean well, Galbraith, but you don't know how hard all this is to bear."

"Maybe no,—maybe no," was the answer; "but she might stay still at the Glebe for all I can see, as long as Jean Campbell is there to take care of her. Jean Campbell is a very decent woman. Margaret

of her, but no yon hasty lassie of an
as she is there there's no such des-
for a change."
et is living, and may live," said Mr.
back into his easy chair.
shook his head. "If one life could
, I would be sore tempted to give her
"it's so little good to a man like me.
life can give. Ye may say it was a
n—daily bread and little more—no
of, nothing like what you call success,
l my mother's when I was a lad. And
's so little, I'll have all the trouble of
h at the hinder end. Poor thing, she
relcome to my life if there was any
ransfer. But ye must put away your
, and get out your books, for yonder
coming down the brae."
after the Kirk Session had met. The
he vestry, the guardians, the church-
otch parish, all in one. Its members
hey are efficient, the curates, so to
ister. It is a local Convocation, with
ts hands which that body does not
the period of which we write, before
ad been made in the Church of Scot-
ty was real and considerable. The
n one by one, and took their place
able in the Manse dining-room, were
ight on the Loch. There was Andrew
William of Wallacebrae, seated on
d there was Mr. Smeaton, of the great
eastern side of the Loch, and Samuel

Diarmid, of Ardintore. The minister took his place at the head of the table, and Mr. Galbraith, with his book of minutes opened before him, prepared to fulfil his office of Session clerk. "I give no opinion," he had said to the other members of the court, "but I'm Session clerk, and I'll not neglect my duty." There was a prayer to begin with, said by the minister, while they all stood up round the table, some with wide open eyes and restless looks, some with bowed heads and reverence. And then the Dominie read the minutes of the last meeting, and the present one was constituted.

"To appoint the Rev. the Moderator, Mr. Andrew White, and Mr. William Diarmid to inquire into the effect of the recent movement in the parish, with power to act against all presuming and schismatical persons that may be taking authority into their own hands."

"I have to ask the Moderator," said the Dominie, "if he is ready to present his report."

"I have to make an explanation instead," said the minister. "We were not agreed. What William Diarmid and myself found to be unreasonable and bordering upon enthusiasm, Andrew approved of with all his heart. I will give you the result of my own inquiries without prejudice to other members of the court. In the first place, there are two or three women who, contrary to all the rules of the church, and to the Apostle's order, take upon them to speak and lead the prayers of the congregation——"

"Wi' a' respect to the minister," said Andrew White, "I've ae small remark to make. If it had been contrary to the order of the Apostles, wherefore does St. Paul speak of the prophetesses that were to have a

veil upon their heads? There's plenty of passages I could quote to that——"

"There's ane that's decisive to my way o' thinking," said William Diarmid. "That women are no to speak in the church."

"A law's one thing," said Samuel of Ardintore. "But an institution that's actually existing is mair to be remembered than ae mention of a rule against it, that might be nae law."

"We can leave that point," said the minister. "I say it is not for edification, that Ailie Macfarlane, though I have not a word to say against her, should be led away by her zeal to take up such a position in the parish. By custom and use, if by nothing else, such things are forbidden. I have not finished. I have to object further that persons holding no office in the church, neither ministers, nor licentiates, nor elders, have likewise taken a leading part, and prayed, and exhorted, and held meetings, that so far as I can see they had no authority for. If it is sanctioned by the Kirk Session, that is a different matter. But the fact is that there are meetings taking place in every quarter of the parish without the authority of the Kirk Session, or so much as a sanction either from the elders or from me."

"I must protest, Moderator," said Samuel Diarmid. "I cannot allow that the freedom of the subject is to be sae confined, that a man canna praise God with his neighbours without authority from the minister; that I canna allow."

"Ye may enter your protest," said the Dominie, "but the Moderator *must say out* his say."

"*And now I come to what is* most serious of all,"

said Mr. Lothian. "It is my opinion that these continual meetings, held by unauthorized persons, are doing harm and not good to the devout in this parish. I say nothing about the wonders that have attended the movement. These may have been delusion; but far be it from me to say that there's been deception——"

"There can be nae deception," said Andrew White, "in the work of the Lord."

"Whisht, man!" said Samuel; "the question the minister puts, if no in as many words, is, If it *is* the work of the Lord?"

"With a' respect to the minister, it's a question like one of the questions of the Pharisees," said Andrew. "What did He answer when John's disciples came to ask Him, 'Art thou He?' 'Look round ye,' says He. 'The blind see, the deaf hear, the lame walk, to the poor the gospel is preached. There's your answer.' Can any man say there's no the same answer to the same question here? The minister tells ye of persons without authority; but I say every man living has an authority to serve his Maker. Which of ye would see his ox or his ass fa' into a pit, even on the Sabbath-day, and no pull him out? And are we to stand by and see our brethren perish? 'Your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams,' says the prophet, 'and upon my servants and upon my *handmaids*—' There are the words, Joel, ii. 28, 29, and quoted in the Acts, second chapter, which gives it double authority. Though she wasna to be born for hundreds of years, do ye think the mind of the Spirit is so confined, that He hadna a thought of His young handmaid on Loch Diarmid when He put thae words *in the* mouth o' the ancient prophet? Ay had He!

and foresaw the very objections ye're making, and prepared a word to end them, if it was by nae better mouth than mine."

Then there was a momentary pause, for Andrew's excitement was great. His heavy, grizzled eyebrows were working, his lips quivering; and such emotion has its advantages and disadvantages, which alike eclipse the ordinary arguments of men. It was Samuel, his supporter, who was the first to speak.

"A' that is very true," he said, "and the minister canna object to real proof. I wouldna say a word that was disagreeable; but I doubt, sir, if ye've had as many seals to your ministry in a' the years ye've been here, as the Lord's servants have had since this outpouring began. It stands to reason, if the Spirit comes Himself in power, that the work will be great; but if we were to insist against Him that a' was to be done our ain way——"

The minister had been struggling with himself against what he would have called the carnal man. A Scotch clergyman is not unused to hear his conduct discussed, and bear it with more patience than would be possible to flesh and blood across the Tweed. But there was in all this a covert disapproval of him of which he was quite conscious, and which fired his blood in spite of himself.

"You forget," he said, "that the office of a minister has its duties. I am responsible to the superior courts, and I am responsible to the country if wild and unruly doings exist in my parish. As members of Session I admit your authority; but it is I that am responsible to the world."

"*For that matter I'm little* heeding," said Samuel.

"The world has naething ado, that I can see, with the kirk; and it's weel kent that in Scotland—thanks to our godly forefathers—the kirk has aye gone the first, and the rest followed after, as is well seen in history. No, nor I'm saying nothing against a minister's office; a godly minister is the greatest character on earth; but, Mr. Lothian, I maun aye maintain that the ministers o' the present day are no infallible; and though I'm the last to be failing in respect, you're but a member of this Kirk Session, and no the Pope yoursel."

"Softly," said the Dominie; "you're going over-fast, Mr. Samuel. I've got the books of discipline here, and I'll read you the law of the kirk on that question, which is different from what you think."

"I care nothing about the books of discipline," said Samuel, with growing excitement; "but I ken weel that if the minister had given us moving gospel sermons instead of thae cauld, moderate discourses about duty, the work would ne'er have been taken out o' his hands. Does the Lord spend his strength for nought? He's waited lang for fruit, and found nane; and instead o' cursing the tree, as He might weel have done,—what do we deserve but the curse?—He's sent His prophets to dig about it and dung it, if peradventure it might yet bear fruit. And I'm saying we'll deserve the fate o' Babylon, and worse, if we send the prophets away."

"I object to the introduction of irrelevant matter into the discussion," said Mr. Lothian, with rising colour. "My sermons are not the question. If there are any objections against them, it is in another place, and before another court, that they must be discussed."

"Na, na, that's no what Samuel means," said Mr. Smeaton, who had not yet spoken. "Hoot, minister, to be that sensitive! For my part there's naething I think mair applicable to a general congregation than a guid practical sermon. Let us ken our duty, at least; and if we dinna do it, it's our ain fault."

"Ye might as well say it's a blind man's fault that he canna see the well ere he fa's into it," said Samuel, with scorn. "If we were like the angels in heaven our duty might be a' we wanted to ken. But we're children o' wrath and no children o' God; and how daurs any man speak to me o' duty afore he has moved me out o' death into life, and shown me how to save my soul? But I'm meaning nae offence to the minister," he added, with a softened voice. "We're none of us denying that Mr. Lothian's awfu' kind, and aye ready to succour them that's in need. Na, na; none of us will gang to the Presbytery wi' complaints. But I wouldna say behind his back anything that I daurna say to his face; and if his sermons were mair rousing, and his applications more pointed——"

"No to disturb the elder that's speaking," said Mr. Galbraith, "but we've wandered far from the object of this meeting—which was to conclude what ought to be done, or if anything ought to be done, about the movement going on in this parish—the prophesyings and the new light."

"For my part," said Mr. William, "I've no objection to meetings now and then. It's a good way of keeping the folk alive, and keeping up their interest; and I wouldna say that Ailie Macfarlane should be put to silence. I canna think but the Spirit in her comes *from above; and we a'* know that she was raised

up by a miracle. I wouldna put a stop to nothing. I would only give them rules to guide them, and appoint the meetings oursels; and let none take place without the minister and an elder, or one of the neighbour ministers; or if that canna be, then twa elders, to see that things are done decently in order. That would be my proposition. No to let the parish go into ranting and violence; and at the same time, so far as it's His doing, no to strive against the Lord."

"And are ye to dictate to the Lord what day He shall come and what day He shall bide?" said Andrew. "If He gives a word of instruction to His servants, is the voice to be silenced by the Kirk Session? I'll never give in to that. If it's the work of man, let it come to an end; but dinna put your straw bands on the flame o' the Spirit o' God."

"That's a' very true," said Mr. Smeaton; "but if the word o' the Lord was to come in the middle of the nicht, when the parish was sleeping, ye wouldna have the prophet rise up and ca' the honest folk out of their beds? And if they can wait till the morning—or rather till the night after, for they're a' at night these prayer-meetings—what's to hinder them to wait till anither day?"

"It's awfu' carnal reasoning," said Samuel Diarmid; "but it's no without meaning for them that ken no better. I wouldna object to William's proposition mysel; but I canna answer for them that feel the word burning within them that they can bide for your set days."

"Your sawbaths and your new moons," said Andrew. "Na, ye might as well leemit the sun in his shining and the dew in its falling—they'll speak in season and out of season. It was for that they were sent."

But Mr. William's conciliatory motion was at last carried after much more discussion. And the struggle did not break the bonds of amity which united the little assembly: Samuel Diarmid volunteered not only his advice, but a cart of guano to a certain field on the glebe, which, in his opinion, was not producing such a crop as it ought. "You're no a married man yoursel, and it's of less importance to ye," Samuel said, "but I canna bide to see land lying idle no more than men." And Andrew White announced the intention of the mistress to send the minister a skep of honey from the hills. "Ye keep nae bees yoursel, which is a pity," said the elder, always with that gentle touch of admonition with which the rural Scotch personage naturally addresses his clergyman. They parted in the soft gloaming, while still there was light enough to guide them on their respective ways. Mr. Smeaton, the stock farmer, had his horse waiting at John Macwhirter's; and the others dropped in there on their homeward way to fight the battle over once more; all but Samuel and Andrew, who climbed the hill together to the mill, where the former was to take a bed for the night, his house being at the furthest limits of the parish, on the other side of "the braes."

"Yon was grand about the minister's sermons, to his face," said Mr. Smeaton, as they went over the whole discussion in the smithy.

"Ay, man; did they gang into that subject? I'm real glad o't," said John Macwhirter; "he's a learned man and a clever man, but he's as fu' of doctrines as an egg's fu' of meat. He's no half practical enough for me."

Thus it will be seen opinions differed widely even on the *primitive shores of the Loch.*

CHAPTER XI.

THE next day, which was Sunday, carried the news of this decision through all the parish. It was a bright morning after the rain, one of those radiant pathetic days which are so usual in the Highlands. The women came across the hill with their dresses "kilted" and pinned up to preserve them from the moisture which glistened on the heather. The birch-trees hung their glistening branches out to the sun. The paths ran with the recent rain; and at the same time the sun shone brilliantly upon everything reflected from the dazzling mirror of the Loch, where not a boat or sign of life disturbed the Sabbatical repose. The gathering of the kirk-going crowd is always a pretty sight. Dissent scarcely existed in those days in such rural places. Groups came gathering along all the paths; the village emptied itself of all but an occasional housewife, or the old grannie too deaf or feeble to join the congregation. While the cracked and miserable bell tingled forth its ten minutes from the tower, the women and children poured into the church, while the men lingered in a crowd in the churchyard waiting till the tingle should be over. This was the habit of the Loch; but to-day these groups were animated by a livelier interest than usual. There was no question of crops outside among the men, nor of measles and hooping-cough among the women rustling and whispering in their pews. "Have ye heard the news that the meetings are stopped?" "I have heard it, but I canna believe it." "I'm very thankful, for there was nae saying what they might

have turned to;" or, "I'm awfu' sorry, and such good as they were doing in the parish." "But the thing is, will Ailie submit, or Mr. John?" These were the words that were whispered from one to another as the bell jingled forth its summons to church. The two thus conjoined had come to be regarded universally as the leaders of the movement; they were patronised and supported by many parochial personages of weight, but in the end it was evidently they who must decide. And nobody could tell as yet what their decision would be. The matter would be "laid before the Lord," and the end was consequently lost in the profoundest darkness, and left room for the fullest discussion. When Ailie came in, with her little Bible folded in her hands, and her eyes cast down in maidenly humility, a thrill ran through the congregation. And when Mr. John passed through the dark ranks of the men outside and went up the narrow stair to the Ardnamore pew in the front of the gallery, passing "the plate" with a half-contemptuous wave of his hand, and with a dark lowering look at the two elders,—by chance Mr. William and Mr. Smeaton—who kept watch over it, the people outside gazed after him and pulled at each other's sleeves that no man might miss the sight. "He's in one of his tantrums," somebody whispered. But what was only a tantrum in the unbeliever, was a fit of prophetic indignation in the religious leader.

"I wouldna wonder if there was some disturbance. Would it no be better if you or me was to speak to him," said Smeaton, always a conciliatory soul.

"He would pay nae heed to you or me; things maun *take their course," said* Mr. William.

But a secret expectation of something about to happen was in everybody's mind. Had the roof been rent asunder, and a sudden vision burst upon them—had fire come down from heaven upon one of the prophetic heads, or any Scriptural miracle been repeated on their behalf, the assembled people would not have wondered. They would have approved of the marvel as a fit testimony to the importance of their judgment, but they would not have received it with surprise.

Mr. Lothian's sermon, as was expected, bore some reference to the momentous crisis of affairs. With that natural perversity to which even the best of men yield like their inferiors, the minister's sermon, instead of being as Samuel Diarmid had suggested, "rousing," was calmer than usual in its tone; and he was so bold, almost rash, all things taken into consideration, as to take his text from the strange description in the Old Testament of those prophets whom Saul joined in their wild rapture of inspiration. By a rare self-denial he refrained from absolutely quoting the words which were on the lips of all his parishioners. "Is Saul also among the prophets?"—but dwelt upon the wild outburst which had so little effect upon the condition of the people, and upon the sorrowful calm of Samuel to whom no such ardour of religious excitement seemed to have been given, "From all we can see," said the minister, "he stood and looked on, not disapproving, but well aware in his heart how little was to be expected from such bursts of enthusiasm." The attention in the church was absorbing. Sometimes there would be a stolen glance at Ailie, who listened like the rest with profound attention, a gleam of colour now and then

flitting over her visionary face; and he was happy who could obtain from his seat a glimpse of the Ardnamore pew, with Mr. John's dark head relieved against the high back. He sat alone, and was very conspicuous in the front of the gallery, and at any time he would have been notable among the shrewd, expressive, peasant countenances round him. Something of the finer and more subtle varieties of expression given by education and intercourse with the world, and—though he was at best but a country squire—something of the flavour of race was in the passionate, dark face, fixed upon the preacher with a defiant attention which seemed likely at any moment to burst into utterance. People said he had actually risen to speak when Mr. Lothian hastily gave the benediction and concluded the service. There had not been so exciting a "diet of worship" on the Loch in the memory of man. The congregation, as it dispersed, broke into little groups, discussing the one subject from every point of view.

"I wonder how he daur speak, with her yonder before him like one of the saints, and sae humble for a' her gifts." "And, eh, I wonder how a young lass could sit and listen to a' yon from the minister and still bide steadfast in her ain way," said the gossips. "But I canna haud with that way o' finding fault with Scripture," said one of the fathers of the village. "A' Scripture's written for our instruction; and wha gave ony man authority to judge the auld prophets as if they were not examples every ane?"

"It's a fashion nowadays," said another. "I've heard some o' them as hard on Jacob, honest man, as if he had been a neebor lad; and as for King Dawvid *and his backslidings*——"

"Had he been a neebor lad, as ye say, he had never come within my door," cried Jenny Spence, "and seeing the Lord puts them to shame Himsel, wherefore should we set up for making them perfect? And, bless me, if ye think of a wheen naked men, tearing their claes, and ranting afore decent folk——"

"Haud your tongue, Jenny!" said John, "or speak o' things ye understand."

"If I didna understand better nor you lads that never take thought of naething, it would be queer to me," retorted Jenny. "What wi' your work, and your clavers, and Luckie Bisset ower the hill——"

"Whisht! whisht! woman, it's the Sawbath-day," said an older neighbour; and then the original subject was resumed.

Among the many church-going parties there was the habitual one from the Glebe. Jean Campbell, in her best attire, the heavy, well-preserved, but somewhat rusty weeds which became the Captain's widow was an imposing figure. Her crape was rather brown, but it was a more perfect evidence of rank to her than silk or satin. Her fresh, comely face looked out pleasantly from the white crimped borders, and overshadowing penthouse of black, which marked her condition. She was no lady herself, she admitted freely without any attempt at evasion; but the Captain, now he was gone, was one of the great ones of the earth. It had been difficult to keep up that delusion while he lived; but Duncan dead might have been the Duke of Wellington, or he might have been the Chevalier Bayard, had Jean ever heard of such a personage. He was the Captain, and everything splendid was involved in the word. With a profound consciousness of her own

as his representative, she preserved
ressing years her rusty crape. Not a
r on all the Loch had deeper weeds
a Isabel by her side in her gray gown
ose ribbons looked fresh as the day.
a walked hand in hand before them in
od behaviour, little Mary saying over
salm she was to repeat to Margaret in
ut Jamie sorely distracted by the sight
is here and there among the heather,
of a blue butterfly on the glistening
erows by the lochside.
any salutations to make as they issued
and pretty Isabel, who was very con-
ttle step of superiority in her position
r notice of her rustic neighbours, "a
listributed her little greetings like a
looking out for Miss Catherine, with
wont to walk home as far as the gate
hus separating herself from the common
her stepmother stood. Isabel was not
xcept on special occasions by that flatter-
ich marked Miss Catherine's full blood
d aristocracy. She was but the Captain's
of her humble friends; and she could
at she took out, as it were, a new patent
means of the Sunday walk with Miss
ich had become almost invariable. She
epmother's shadow and protection, look-
r exalted friend, a pretty impersonation
de and timidity, with a certain soft re-
t her unknown to the Loch, while Jean
er friends. Many was the glance of ad-

miration cast at Isabel. The curious claim she had upon them as being no more than their equal, and yet their superior, attracted to her the observation of all the women of the Loch. They looked at her dress, though that was plain enough, with interest, and sometimes admiration. "Look well at Isabel of the Glebe as you pass her; you maun make your new frock like yon," an anxious mother would say to her daughter. "They say she's aye meeting that young Stapylton on the braes, but he daurna come near her on the Sabbath-day." "Eh, no, I'm thinking he wouldna have the face, and her waiting for Miss Catherine." Isabel was softly conscious of the comments made upon her. When Margaret and she were children, standing together waiting for their father on the same spot ten years before, the same looks had been turned upon them; the same curious observations made on their dress and their "manners;" and "Ye dinna see the wee ladies behaving like that," had been a common admonition to the unruly children around.

"I hope you are all well," she said to Jenny Spence with the pretty "English," which the Loch admired, and which, to tell the truth, Isabel herself often forgot, except on those Sabbatical occasions. And Jenny felt the compliment of the salutation and the pride of the connexion so profoundly that she rushed into eager tender inquiries about Margaret, overwhelming the girl with her reverential affection. Between the two square, middle-aged, well-developed figures of her stepmother and her "connexion," Isabel stood, slim and fair, more visible by the contrast. Stapylton, not venturing to approach, as the gossips concluded, stood gazing at her from the outskirts. More than one ob-

een the minister himself look tenderly
he left the pulpit; and while she
g dignity, listening to Jenny Spence,
ident occurred that increased still
rtance with the crowd. Ailie Mac-
in the habit of speaking to any one
urch. She would pass through them
Bible folded in her hands, her eyes
or gazing rapt into the air, while
way for her. But when she ap-
n this memorable day, Ailie paused.
her hands from her Bible, and sud-
n Isabel's. It was cold; and the girl,
ected it, made a little start backward

e to your warm blood," said Ailie;
you. But I'm no acting on my ain
Diarmid, promise me you'll come to
ng the morn."

w can I promise?" said Isabel in dis-
garet so ill."

that up for an excuse. I'm bidden to
n that will have no excuse," said Ailie.
aster she standeth or falleth—I'm no
t. But, Isabel, I'm bidden to summon

ave my sister," faltered Isabel, raising
e crowd with a mute appeal for de-

ave her for the hill," said Ailie, very
she added hurriedly, "It's no me that
awfu' trouble and sorrow in your way,

and you're but a soft, feckless thing to bear it. Come to the prayer-meeting the morn."

It was just at this moment that Miss Catherine appeared. Isabel's eyes had been diverted for the moment away from the church, and she had not seen the approach of her friend; who laid her hand upon the girl's shoulder as Ailie repeated her invitation.

"Ailie Macfarlane," Miss Catherine said, while Isabel started nervously at the unexpected touch. "You are not to bid her to your meetings; she is too young, and she is my kinswoman, and I cannot let her go."

"If she was the queen's kinswoman I would bid her," said Ailie. "What are your ranks and degrees to the Spirit of the Lord? I'm offering her far more than you can offer her, though you're a lady and me but a simple lass. Now that persecution has come upon us, as was to be looked for, it canna be but the Spirit will be poured out double. It's out of love to Isabel I ask her, that she may taste the first-fruits and be kent for ane of the chosen. Who are you that would stand between the Lord and His handmaid? I'm freed from earthly bonds this day. Isabel, I'll say nae mair to ye; but tell Margaret I bid her arise and meet me—for the corn is whitening to the harvest; and come yoursel."

When she had said these words she passed on with the same rapt look as before, speaking to no one, seeing no one. The people round had gathered close to hear what she said, and dispersed slowly out of her path as she turned, making way for her reluctantly, and full of curiosity. Some of the women even plucked at her dress as she passed. "Eh, Ailie! speak one word. Will't bring judgment on the parish?" said

e. But Ailie made no reply. She
them, with that directness and silent
which gives a certain spiritual and
very movements of the abstracted

gotten her simple vanity. She stood
ears in her eyes, by Miss Catherine's
pable of pride in being thus adopted
rge of the great lady of the parish.
coming to grief and trouble, sobbed
h, is it my Margaret she means?"
d Miss Catherine, drawing Isabel's
r own; "you must not cry before all
e and tell me all that ails you. Is
that you tremble so? and what can
know about it more than you or me?
well as Margaret herself?"
as true that she had the Spirit?" fal-
ough her tears. "And oh, Miss Ca-
to my heart what she aye says—if
t faith!"
as all the faith a Christian woman
ure of that," said Miss Catherine, with
d I wish the minister had taken order
stop to all this. But, Isabel, there
things in your way than the grief we
dear, I have been wanting long to
Put Ailie and her raving out of your
cannily up to Lochhead with me."
ill want me," said Isabel, awakening
ense that admonitions of another kind
er her.
p you long," said Miss Catherine, "and

Jean shall say where you are. Good day, Mrs. Diarmid. I am taking Isabel with me to have a talk. Give Margaret my love, and I'll walk up to see her this afternoon and bring her sister back. There's no change?"

"I canna say there's ony change, Miss Catherine," said Jean, divided between the melancholy meaning of what she said and the glory of this address; for even Miss Catherine, punctilious as she was in giving honour where honour was due, seldom addressed her by the dignified title of Mrs. Diarmid; "but she's aye wearing away, and weaker every day."

"The Lord help us, there's nothing else to be looked for," said Miss Catherine, sadly. And Isabel, who had regained her composure to some extent, fell weeping once more, silently leaning on her friend's arm. There was nothing more said till they descended the brae, and made their way through the village. The Lock had never been trained to the custom of curtseying to the lady of the manor. The groups stood aside with kindly looks to let her pass, and here and there a man better bred than usual took off his hat; but the salutations in general were rather nods of friendly greeting and smiles that broadened the honest rural faces than more reverential servilities. "How are all at home, John?" Miss Catherine said, in her peremptory way as she passed. "How is all with ye, Janet?" And then there was a needful pause, and the story of the children's recovery from some childish epidemic would be told, or of the letter from "the lads" in Canada, or of family distress and anxiety. When they were quite free of these interruptions, which had once more the effect of bringing composure to Isabel, whose April

tears dried quickly, and whose heart could not be coerced out of hope, Miss Catherine turned to the special charge she had taken upon her.

"My dear," she said, "I am going to be a cruel friend. I have made up in my mind all manner of hard things to say to you, Isabel. You are not to take them ill from me. We're kindred far removed, but yet there's one drop's blood between you and me, and I know nobody on the Loch that wishes you well more warmly. Will you let me speak as if I were your mother? Had she been living it would have been her place."

"Miss Catherine," said Isabel, with a thrill of nervous impatience, a sudden heat flushing to her face, "how can you ask it? Ye have always said whatever you liked to me."

"And you think I've sometimes been hard upon you?" said Miss Catherine. "Well, we'll not argue. Your mother was younger than me, Isabel, and she had no near friends any more than you. If she had had a father or a brother to take care of her, she never would have married Duncan Diarmid. I am meaning no offence to the Captain. He did very well for himself, and a man that makes his way is always to be respected; but he was a different man from what your mother thought when she married him, and her life was short, and far from happy. She was a sweet, wilful, tender, hot-tempered thing, just like you."

"Eh, I'm no wilful!" said Isabel, thrilling in every vein with the determination to resist all advice that could be given to her. They were almost alone on the green glistening road which wound round the head of the Loch, *and the water rippled* up upon the pebbles,

and flashed like a great mirror in the sunshine. The girl's heart rose with the exhilaration of the brightness. It is easy to forget that it ever was, or ever can be, anything but bright, when youth and sunshine both unite to convince the heart to the contrary. After all, Margaret had made many rallies before, and would—might—must rally again; and Stapylton would be tender and true, and everything would go well. Why should any monitor take the other side of the question, and press the life out of the young heart with visionary fear?

"Your mother would take no advice," said Miss Catherine, "and she died at five-and-twenty, and left you, two poor babies, without a mother to guide you in the world."

"But, oh, it was not her fault she died," cried Isabel. "Folk die that are happy too."

"I'll tell you what it was," said Miss Catherine; "not to put you against your father. He never pretended to more than he was. Duncan was aye honest, whatever else. But your mother saw qualities in him that no mortal could see. And when the hasty thing saw her idol broken, her heart broke too; and you're like her—too like, Isabel."

"For one thing at least, I'm wronging nobody; and why should you say all this to me?" cried the girl all flushed and resentful, and yet struggling with her tears.

"How can I tell what you might be tempted to do? Margaret Diarmid—that's your mother—gave me her word she would take time and think, and the very *next Sabbath* she was cried in the kirk! Isabel, I said

Do you know, do you ever think,
on you, bairn?"
10 answer—her resentment could not
1 solemnity of tone. She raised her
erine as one who awaits the sentence

re running about, out and in, like a
l, and singing your songs, and work-
, and meeting strange folk upon the
s Catherine with emphasis. "I am
even for the last. But all this time
day when you will be left alone in
. Your bit cottage will still be yours
home; but a home that's empty and
that? And none to lean on, none to
e to be your guide—silence in the
)ld on the hearth; and you no better
ed from your cradle to lean on her
what will you do when you are alone

garet!" cried Isabel, drawing her hand
arm and bursting into a passion of
re within the gate at Lochhead, and
e by to see the girl's weeping, which
trol. She had been told of it again
realized it to some degree, but never
ought her imagination to bear on the
d for herself after her sister was gone.
was softened by the violence of her
)ok Isabel into her arms and let fall a
of her old eyes, to mingle with those
hat came wrung out of the other's very

"Oh, you are cruel, cruel," cried Isabel, struggling out of her embrace; "I will die too! I canna bear it; I canna bear it! It is more than I can bear."

Then Miss Catherine led her, blind with her tears, to a grassy seat hid among the trees, and sat down by her and did her best to administer comfort. "Isabel, you know well it must be so," she said at length, with some severity. "It cannot be that you have found it out for the first time to-day."

"Oh, do not speak to me," cried Isabel; "how can ye dare to say it is to be, when God could raise her up in a moment like Ailie? And there was Mary Diarmid down the Loch that was—dying—that 's what they said—and even she got the turn. Oh, do not speak to me, God is not cruel as you say."

All these reproaches Miss Catherine bore, sitting compassionately by her victim until the force of her passion was spent; and when Isabel, faint and exhausted, like a creature in a dream, could resist no longer, she resumed where she had left off.

"My dear, I am thinking what is to become of you when this comes to pass—and so does Margaret. Bless her, she thinks of you night and day; and many a talk we have about you, Isabel, when you're little thinking of us. There is one good man in the parish that loves you well——"

"I want no love," answered the girl, almost sullenly. "Oh, Miss Catherine, don't speak like this to me."

"But I am speaking for Margaret's sake. There is one that would be a comfort and strength and blessing to any woman. And there is the other lad. Isabel! your father was rough and wild, and not a match for my kinswoman Margaret Diarmid; but he had always

a heart. This lad has little heart. If you but heard how he can speak of them you hold most dear——"

"Miss Catherine," said Isabel, with a voice of despair, starting to her feet, "I will run home to Margaret; I can bear no more."

CHAPTER XII.

THE prayer-meeting on Monday evening was the most exciting "occasion" that had been known on the Loch for years. At this the decision of the prophets would be made known, as the decision of the Kirk Session had already been. It was moonlight, that great necessity of all rural evening gatherings; and from all the corners of the parish came curious hearers eager to know what was the next step to be taken. Mr. William's wife from Wallacebrae was even one of the audience undeterred by her husband's objections. "How can I say I'm against them, and my ain wife led away to hear?" he said. "Hoot away! No to hear them; but to see what they will do," said Mrs. Diarmid, "am I one to be led away?"

And Isabel, who had begun to place a certain vague hope in Ailie, after the struggle she had gone through the day before, had made up her mind to obey the injunction so strongly laid upon her, and to go also. "I would like to hear what they say, and what they are going to do," she said to her sister, in almost the same words which the mistress at Wallacebrae had given as her excuse, owning no sympathy with the enthusiasts, but a ple cur*iosity.*

"I *you must not go to hear* the Word of God as

if it were a play," said Margaret, "it is always the Word of God whoever speaks it. If you are but going out of curiosity, Isabel, it would be better to bide with me."

"I would rather stay with you than do anything else in the world; if you would but stay with me," said Isabel, with wistful looks, "and try, maybe, what Ailie said?"

"Ye vex me," said the dying girl. But the tone was so soft that it could scarcely be called a reproach. And yet Margaret felt that to remain with her in the unbroken quiet of the long evening was more than Isabel could now bear. There were the braes with all their wistful delights to tempt her forth, and her own unquiet, restless heart, tortured by doubt and grief, and distracting gleams of the future; and there was perhaps the lover whom in her heart she yearned for and yet had begun to flee. Her thoughts went quick and grew breathless, and choked her, as she sat in the quiet of the little parlour with the two candles lighted, and the summer night shut out, and the clock ticking loud through the silent house. Margaret divined all this, though not a word was said. Better the prayer-meeting now with its excitement than to stay with the sufferer seeing her cheek grow pale, her thin hands thinner every moment. She did no injustice to her sister, even in the pang of the discovery that Isabel could not remain with her contented as of old. She understood that the sight of her gradual calm decay was intolerable to the young tender creature, whose life had been wrapt up in hers.

"*She* cannot bear to look at me now she sees so *plain* what's coming," Margaret would say to herself

and felt no resentment though a tear would come to the corner of her eye. But there was more in Isabel's thoughts than Margaret's virgin soul could divine. Notwithstanding the anguish which overwhelmed her, when she was called upon to contemplate the event which would make an end of one stage of existence for her, all the agitation and tumult of another life was in Isabel's heart. She felt, and hated herself for the feeling, that she would not die when her sister did, and that she had no wish to die. She felt the thrill of contingencies behind which would come into being after Margaret was gone. She felt life stretching broad before her, dark, like a starless night, but yet full like the night, of rustling among the trees and stirrings in the heather, such as moved her soul with premonitions that were not pain. It was involuntarily, by some power beyond her own will, that such vague flutterings of the future came upon Isabel, and she hated herself for them. Oh, how heartless she was, how stony-hearted, as all the ministers said to be able to feel as if life was possible without Margaret! She struggled against the tumults of her young blood, weeping wildly, resisting the movements of nature, and quite unaware that it was nature that moved her; and she felt guilty and miserable in her sister's presence. Oh, for that miracle that would save Margaret and set Isabel right with herself! Oh, to be set free from the awful thought that death was coming, while life thus struggled in her own heart! But all this time death came nearer and nearer, and showed more conspicuously every hour in Margaret's worn face and faltering steps. It was all she could do now to rise from her bed, and totter to her *chair in the parlour. And Isa*bel could not bear to

see this lingering tragedy enacted before her. To go anywhere! to be absent and able to dream that "some change," some wonder, might have happened while she was absent, was the sick, unnatural longing of her heart.

"*She* is going," Isabel said again, after a pause, "and you are always so kind, you say ye want for nothing, Margaret. It is not for curiosity. They told me I was warned by name. No, I am not going away after them; I was thinking of different things."

"Ever of that miracle?" said Margaret, with a faint smile, "which will never come. If it was not for you, Isabel, it would be a miracle to me to be away. But we will no speak of that; leave little Mary with me if you will go,—not that I want anybody. I am real well to-night, and no breathless to speak of; but it's ill for the bairn."

"Oh, Margaret! I feel whiles as if you thought more of that bairn than of your own sister!" said Isabel, with all the hot jealousy of a heart which felt itself divided and guilty.

"She *is* my sister," said Margaret, softly; "but nobody could ever be like my Bell; it would be strange if you needed to be told that now."

And then the impatient, impetuous girl wept and upbraided herself. "Oh, I am not myself, I am not myself!" she said; "I'm all wrong; it's as if I could not submit to God."

"My bonnie Bell!" said Margaret, wistfully, gazing at the perplexing creature, whom she could not understand, and laying her hand upon the bowed-down head. A little sigh of weariness mingled with her perplexity. She had come to that point when peace is demanded

re; and those tumults were too much
n something warm," she said, "and
t to go too far in; but be home soon
what's passed. If Ailie speaks to you,
well and content."
her you are better? Oh, will I say
Margaret?"
think how you vex me," said poor
g, "you more than all. Why should
r on my journey now, and why should
: to tread all the weary way over again
Tell Ailie I'm winning home. The
nd maybe the last bit is the steepest;
ntent. If you will not say that, say
And if you are going, it is time for

and leave you angry, Margaret," cried
nd vexed at me?"
angry," said Margaret, wearily. The
come into her cheek. She laid her
he cushions with again a weary sigh.
' she longed for the end,—she to whom
er anything to give? She closed her
ent, and Isabel, feeling more guilty
away to warn her stepmother, and to
e bonnet and great grey cloak. "You'll
that she wants nothing; but you'll not
wear her out," she said to little Mary,
' her sister's love. And then said to
w heartless she was to feel a pleasure
d that blew in her face, and in the
g Stapylton, if it were but on the road,
tement of going to this meeting! What

could she do? The one was dying, the other living; strong impulses drew Isabel to the living world—and a stronger impulse still, the very tie that knits heaven to earth, drew Margaret towards that solemn starry darkness in which she was so soon to be swallowed up. The twin sisters had been one till now, but now could be one no more.

The moon was shining veiled in clouds upon the Loch, now bursting forth into the fullest radiance, now leaving nothing but a luminous track across the sky. The road was almost as full of passengers as if it had been Sunday. People were coming from far and near, even from the other end of the Loch; one or two boats-full were crossing the water, their oars sounding far in the stillness. When the moon disappeared behind the clouds, the sound of the oars, and of the voices, all about in the darkness, were like the impressions of a dream; and lights twinkled in the village windows, and from the town of Lochhead. Isabel Diarmid, by her stepmother's side, in unusual contiguity and fellowship, went silent like a dreaming creature. Agitation, compunction, a sense of guilt, and yet of stolen pleasure, a thrill of the universal excitement which made her heart beat, and at the same time a consciousness that she should have been elsewhere, and was virtually forsaking her sister and her duty, so filled her with conflicting emotions that she had no voice left to speak. To Jean's remarks about their fellow-passengers on the road she made no reply, and indeed shrank, with the pride which was natural to her, from confounding herself with the stream of "common folk." There was no Miss Catherine to-night to restore her confidence in her *superior* position. "Eh, is this Isabel?" the gossips

said when they had greeted her stepmother. She was humiliated in her own esteem in addition to all other feelings; yet she persevered and went on, eager, though she did not know why, for anything to distract her thoughts. A girl in such a position, half despairing, beset on every side, full of the anguish, and yet full of the irrepressible hopes, of youth—driven by the tumult in her heart from her habitual counsellors, feeling guilty, wretched, unpardonable, confused by her very innocence—is the being of all others most ready to plunge into any possible dissipation. It was but a prayer-meeting, but it answered, and more than answered, all the purposes of a ball. Now and then a glimpse of the scene she had left behind, of Margaret sitting in the silence with little Mary's eager eyes watching her, and her "own" sister gone, would gleam across Isabel's eyes, giving her a pang she could scarcely bear; but how could she have borne it to sit and gaze at Margaret, and hear the clock ticking and the life ebbing away? So she went on, feeling as if she were in a dream, a pilgrim among other half-seen figures on the darkling road, hearing voices, and the plash of the oars, and thinking that every moment she might wake and find herself—where? alone in this echoing, vacant world.

The schoolhouse was all dark when the crowd reached it. Instead of the usual preparation for them the door was locked, and the Dominie stood on the step, looking down upon the dark groups as they began to arrive and gather round, with the patience of the rural mind. "The door's no open yet." "The lights are no lighted." "I tell't ye, for a' your grumbling, we would be *here soon enough.*" "It's no often Ailie's

late." "And what's the Dominie waiting there like a muckle ghost," murmured the crowd.

Mr. Galbraith, to tell the truth, was in no desirable position. He had the key in his hand, but that could not be seen; and he was charged with the dangerous mission of temporising, and commissioned to coax the multitude out of their excitement, and persuade them to go quietly home. If he did not succeed, there was always the key to fall back upon. "In the last place, if better is not to be made of it, I'll let them have their will," he had said. Of all offices in the world, the least satisfactory. Already he had begun to see that it was a mistake, but it was now too late to withdraw. "They should have found a' dark and been treated to no explanations," he said to himself, as he stood with his back against the door and gazed on them. A mob is not an easy thing to deal with in any circumstances; and a religious mob, spurred up to the highest point of spiritual excitement, is the most dangerous of all. Had it not been for the large leaven of mere curiosity which kept down the pitch of agitation, things might have gone badly for the Dominie. He cleared his throat a great many times before he screwed himself to the point of addressing them. The prophets themselves had not yet appeared, and if it might be possible to dismiss the people before the arrival of their leaders, a great point would be gained. Spurred by this thought he at last broke the silence.

"My friends," said the Dominie; and there was an immediate hush of the scraping feet, and the coughs and whispers of impatience. The moon had gone in and all was dark, so that he could distinguish none of the faces turned to him, and felt, as few orators can

do, the sense of that vague abstraction, a crowd unbroken by the glance of any exceptional sympathetic face. "My friends, I'm here to say a word to you from the Kirk Session. Those that are put over ye in the Lord have taken much thought and counsel together to see what's best to be done. I am reflecting upon nobody. It's not my place to tell you who you are to hear, or when you are to forbear. But I appeal to those that are heads of families if there have not been too many of these meetings? The human mind is not equal to such a strain. I've studied it all my life, and ye may believe me when I speak. There must be a Sabbath for the body, and the mind's mair delicate than the body. But any night, every night, have ye no assembled here, to listen to the most agitating addresses, given, I do not gainsay, with what is more touching than oratory, with the whole conviction of the soul. My friends, ye have but a delicate machine to manage. Your minds are no like your ploughs that are simple things to guide. They're like the new-fangled steam-engines, full of delicate bits of wheels, and cranks, and corners——"

At this moment a figure glided up to him out of the crowd. The Dominie divined at once whose were those swift and noiseless steps, and felt that his oratory and his object were defeated. She came and placed herself beside him holding up her hand, and at that moment the moon burst forth and shone full upon Ailie's face, which in that light was white as marble, with the full large lambent eyes, almost projected from it, looking out upon the eager spectators.

"Comena here with your carnal wisdom," said Ailie, *putting up her hand as if* to stop him. "Oh

comena here! What's learning, and knowledge, and a' your science afore the fear of the Lord? And how dare ye stop His servants from constant prayer to Him, and saving souls? Will ye quench the Spirit, O man, with your vain words? Think ye we're sae little in earnest that we want biggit walls to shelter us, or your fine candles to give us light? The Lord is our light," cried the prophetess, stretching out her hand towards the moon that shone full upon her. And there was a rustle and stir in the crowd which told the instant response of the audience.

The Dominie's own feelings were not beyond the reach of such an apostrophe. He moved uneasily from one foot to another, and began to fumble in his coat-pocket for the key, the last concession which he was prepared to make.

"I am saying nothing against that, my good lass," he said; "not a word am I saying, but that for you and the like of you there's too much of this; and that's the Kirk Session's opinion. You shall have plenty of opportunity,—plenty of occasion, but, my dear, for the sake of your own life, and for all the rest of them, not every night——"

"Friends," said another voice suddenly from another quarter, "it is nothing wonderful if persecution has come upon us. I have expected it from the first. The hand of this world is against the servants of God, and ever will be. We are driven forth like our forefathers to the hill-side. The Church has shut to her doors against us. I told you it would be so. I told you a lukewarm, unawakened Church would never bear that within her bosom that was a reproach to her. *And what of that?*" the speaker went on with growing

excitement, "there is God's word that they cannot drive us out of, and God's lights that He has set for us in the heavens, and His ear that is ever open, and His hand that is ready to save. On your knees, my brethren! What hinders that we should pray to Him here?"

Then there arose a murmur among the crowd: "It's Mr. John!" "Eh, it's the days of the persecution come back." "We'll no thole't." "Who's the minister or the Kirk Session either to stand up against the Christian people?" "And quench the Spirit?" cried a voice above the rest; "do they mind that's the unpardonable sin?"

Mr. Galbraith made vain efforts to speak; the murmurs rose higher and higher, and began at last to direct themselves to him. "Is the like of that weirdless Dominie to stand against ye a', feeble loons?" cried a woman. "Wha's he that he should daur to stand against us?" "Let me at him!" "Eh, lads, canny, canny, he's an auld man." Such were the cries of indignation and alarm that rose in the stillness. The remnant of people who had been left in the village came rushing forth to see what was the matter. Mr. Lothian was at the other end of the parish, but young Stapylton, who had just returned from a fruitless ramble on the braes, came lounging to the Manse gate. The moon went suddenly behind a cloud, leaving all that darkling mass confused and struggling. Then it was that the Dominie made himself heard. "Lads," he shouted, his voice reaching the entire crowd though he was himself unseen, "I've trained ye, and I'm reaping the credit. If it was for your sakes ye might tear *the auld man in pieces before* you should have your

will. Dinna think ye can frighten me. If I give the key to Ailie, it is for the women's sake; and the bairns."—Women, are ye mad that ye bring bairns here?"

"It's because their souls are mair precious to us than a' the world," cried some mother in the crowd. "It's little enough you teach them," cried another. "Where would they hear the Gospel if no in the meetings?" "No in the kirk, wi' a moderate minister and his moral essays." "And now when we've found the Word of God ye would drive us to the hillside to seek it." "They would drive us into the Loch if they had their will," cried the crowd.

Isabel Diarmid, with all her sensibilities in arms, humiliated to the dust, indignant, terrified, stood trembling in the midst of this seething, agitated mass, thrust about by its sudden movements, ready to cry or to faint, feeling her self-respect for ever lost, no better than "a common lass" among the crowd. She strained her eyes, but could not make out whether the Dominie had escaped from the insults offered to him. She felt herself drawn along by the movement of the people round her rushing in one body for the door, which, with much noise of the key in the keyhole, had at length been opened. And as she turned round in a vain, helpless endeavour to free herself she caught sight of the figure at the Manse gate, and felt hot shame flush to her face. Was it the minister looking on, or Stapylton?—the two men who loved her—was it possible he could see her, in her humiliation? What would either think of the girl they placed on such a *pedestal*, could they recognise her drawn along, elbowed, *and struggling*, among these common folk? Clinging

to her stepmother, vainly resisting, overwhelmed with shame, she felt herself swept out of the fresh air into the dark schoolroom no longer an individual with a will of her own, but a helpless portion of the crowd. What would Miss Catherine say, what would Margaret think? Margaret, sinking softly away at home with nobody to watch her but little Mary. These moments of shame and compunction were as an age to the girl. And she was half stifled by the flood which thus carried her reluctantly with it, and terrified by the rush, and the crowding, and the darkness. "Eh, Margret would ne'er forgive me if she heard of this," gasped Jean, holding her fast by her hand. When the first pioneers succeeded in lighting one miserable candle to throw a glimmer over the scene, its feeble rays, gave no one any assistance, but only cast a wretched twinkle of revelation, showing the struggle,—the benches pushed aside by the blind, uncertain crowd; the throng pouring in darkling through the black doorway. By degrees a few other feeble twinkles began to glitter about the room, and the people subsided into seats, with much commotion and struggling.

"Eh, woman, sit up a bit!" "Take care where ye're gaun,—that's my wean." "Take off your hat, honest man; I canna see nothing for ye."

Such were the compliments passing among the audience. It was some time before they were all settled in their places. Everything was new to Isabel; when she found herself established at last out of the tumult, in a corner against the wall, where she flattered herself nobody could see her, she drew breath again. The strange gloom, the flicker of the candles, the eager *look of all those faces turned* towards the Dominie's

table, at which stood Mr. John; the thrill of excitement and expectation among them, overcame Isabel's susceptible nature. The very breath failed on her lips in her eagerness. What might she be about to hear—the heaven opened and voices issuing out of it, or a revelation from heaven, as wonderful in its way? All her shame disappeared before the extraordinary fire of popular emotion which she had suddenly caught. If she could be said to have hated any man in the world, Mr. John would have been the man. And yet she sat and gazed at him as if he had been an angel of fate.

"It's come at last," he said; "my brothers, I've been looking for it long. „ None can live godly in Christ Jesus but suffer persecutions. And Satan has found his instruments. Two nights had not gone from your first meeting in this place when the Lord showed me how it would be. But are we to give up our sacred standard because the heathen rage and the people imagine a vain thing—ay, a vain thing! As well might they bind the Loch that the flood should not come up. Has not the Spirit of the Lord come like a flood upon this parish; and they try to stop Him with a key turned in the lock and a shut door! But the Lord has opened us a door, great and effectual. Praise Him, my friends, that He has given us the victory. The horse and his rider has He overthrown in the sea——"

"But this is awfu' irregular" cried another personage, who rose suddenly out of the darkness, and was discovered after a time to be Samuel Diarmid the elder. He came out of the front row, which was merely a range of dark heads to the people behind, and stepped

before the prophet with a small Bible in his hand. "My friends," he said, "though Mr. Galbraith took upon him to shut ye out o' this public place belonging to the parish, I'm here in my capacity as an elder o' this parish to preside among ye. I hope there's none here will dispute my right. We'll open the meeting in the usual way by singing to the praise of God in the Psalms; and after the meeting's lawfully constituted, ye shall hear whatever word the Lord's servant may have to say."

At this announcement, there arose a sudden rustle and resolute thumbing of the Psalms, which were attached to everybody's Bible. The audience found the place conscientiously, though only a few could by any possibility see the page. Samuel himself led the singing, standing with his book in his hand, and his figure swaying to and forward with the cadence of the "tune;" and seated in darkling rows, with their books held in every possible slope to reach the light, the audience lifted up their voices and sang one of those strange measures at which musicians stand aghast.

"Perhaps Dundee's wild warbling measures rise,
Or plaintive Martyrs worthy of the name."

The Psalm was sung in unison, and yet, heaven knows, in but small harmony, by all the voices, from the man's deep bass to the child's shrill treble. And yet it was not without solemnity. Everybody was in deadly earnest. The strain might be eccentric, and the singing altogether beyond all rules of art; but the strange song, half repeated from memory, half elucitated in the darkness by anxious eyes, and poured forth with all its meaning in it, fresh out of the minds, if not the *hearts, of so many half-visible* people, had a power

over the primitive and uncultivated mass which the loveliest strains of music often fail in. Isabel sang it with all her heart. No criticism occurred to her. Her ear was not shocked by the false notes, the curious growls and creaks of utterance around her.

"I wait for God, my soul doth wait;
My hope is in His Word.
More than they that for morning watch,
My soul hopes in the Lord."

And then she closed her little Testament, and stood up, covering her face with her hands for the prayer. It was the prayer of a man having authority which Samuel Diarmid poured forth; and in that darkness through which no man could make out his neighbour's face, the crowd stood and listened. It was a curious way in which to exhibit High Churchmanship and ecclesiastical authority; but yet no ritualist, struggling for bell, book, and candle, could have been more thoroughly persuaded that he was preserving the discipline of the Church, and doing all things decently and in order, than was Elder Samuel. He was conscious that he was so far rebelling against the authority of the Session in leading this unauthorized assembly, but felt in himself the spirit of a martyr, ready to sacrifice everything to his duty. "They may reprimand me," he said to himself; "but I'll no let it be said that in Lochhead parish there was no elder with that regard for his fellow-creatures to run the risk o' a reprimand for them." His prayer was a kind of liturgy in itself. He prayed for her Sacred Majesty, as is the custom in Scotland, and for the Government and *magistrates*, and every class of men who could be put *together* in a general supplication. There was some-

alf-solemn in his formality; but it
udience as anything peculiar. They
when it was ended, with conscious
ief.

' dry and fusionless in his prayers,"
Isabel, "but wait till it's Ailie's
ncerned that her stepdaughter should
eting," and not be discouraged by
ng. When they had all resumed
aker opened his Bible and began to
For some part of this, all went on
nd decorum. You might have been
said to herself, had it not been so
eople so thronged together. The
ng through her mind when all at
und startled her. She rose to her
ing where it might come from; but
no one else moved. Heads were
attention of the mass was quickened,
herself thought, as Isabel did, that
had happened. What the sound
ot tell, "some said it thundered, or
." The utterance was like a sudden
ind; or a heavy, sudden stroke upon
ud and wild that the silence which
ent, was as grateful as relief after
was a pause. Isabel, in the ex-
zement, stood peering into the dark-
the only one who did so. Her heart
in her breast—a pang of impatience,
through her. Who could it be that
the worship? But while she gazed
suddenly arose another sound; this

time it was a voice distinct and musical. An
relieved, sat down again, and lent an atter
The next moment she was once more on her
confusion too great to be restrained. "Wha
saying? what is she saying?" she whispere
stepmother's ear. Jean, habituated to the wor
scandalized by this excitement. She twi
Isabel's cloak to drag her back to her seat. '
sit down. It's nothing but the tongue," she s
girl strained her eyes upon the listening crow
one was moved as she was. She dropped back
into her seat. It was Ailie who spoke; and i
tense silence and darkness poured forth an ad
of that eloquence of intonation and expressi
is perceptible in every language. "Is it Lat
Hebrew?" Isabel asked herself, moved by
and awe, and admiration, into an indescribabl
ment. Some sacred language employed by th
of God it seemed to her it must be; and to
poured forth over the heads of the common
sat listening, wondering, not so much impr
Isabel! Though not a single word was intel
her, she followed every word with a rapt
What was it? why was it? The rest of the
sat half stupid, half curious, sometimes with
each other or whispered exclamation, "She's
the tongue to-nicht," waiting for the prelimin
over. When the voice suddenly paused, and
and turned into ordinary utterance, there wa
rustle of roused attention among the crowd; b
leant back upon the wall and burst into sil
The excitement had been more than she co
When she came to herself the same fresh

the room ring, and compelled her
like bringing down to ordinary life
of youthful fancies. All Isabel's
. those complications of thought and
herself did not understand, seemed
ot utterance in the wild, meaning-
les. It was to her what a fine strain
ve been—an outcry of that which
and unspeakable. When she awoke
of her excitement, and found that
g so as everybody understood her,
e mystery were gone.
faith," cried Ailie, "wherefore do
feared to go forth from the fine kirk
le meeting to the hills and the fields?
went to commune with His Father,
le? was it to biggit land, or light-
; but to the cauld hill-side in the
ing was but God and the stars look-
the lonesome sky. O the puir crea-
ie puir creatures! Think ye it's for
bit corner of the earth that He has
to rise up from my bed, and poured
tongues, and teaching and prophesy-
arish? I was like you. He knows
I was to come out of the kirk I was
d open my heart to the weary, want-
I take ye a' to witness it's no us that
ey have lifted up their hands against
ord. They've tried their best to stop
stry and in the salvation of souls.
and they've said where are the signs
. Look round ye, friends, and see.

Me that never learned more than my Bible,—
wi' tongues—I see the things that are to com
ye that is for nought? It fell on your sons
daughters in your very presence and is that for
Bear ye witness, friends, that I take up my
sion this night. Go forth into the world an
the Gospel to every creature, that is the comma
given to me. Throw off your bonds, ye tha
arise and let us go forth! It's no a question o'
or o' a village, or o' a kirk or a meeting, bu
coming to be prepared and the world to be sa

Whether this wild but sweet voice had c
natural pause, or whether it was suddenly in
and broken by the same extraordinary burst
which had been heard before, Isabel, terrifi
all her self-control, could not tell. She gav
pressed scream, as Mr. John stood up with
arms stretched out and his features convulsed
passion of utterance whatever it was. The sou
had alarmed her came from him, bursting
lips as if by some force which had no relati
own will or meaning. The cry came from
the groanings and mutterings of a volcano, n
some unseen power. Isabel clung to her st
in her terror and hid her face in her hands.

"It's awsome the first time," whispered J
soling her. "It's awfu' awsome to see the s
that, rending and riving; but he'll soon speak
my pet! It's aye a' the grander when he spe

Such sounds echoing through the darken
over all those hushed and eager listeners, wer
sive enough to overawe any lively imaginatio
was with her head bent down on Jean C

shoulder, and her eyes closely shut, that Isabel heard the inarticulate horror change into words.

"Hear the voice of the handmaid of the Lord," cried Mr. John. "The Lord sent His servant to her with a word from Him, saying, Go forth and convert the world; but she would not listen. She said, Who am I that I should go forth and preach? Thy handmaid is a child, she said. But lo! the Lord himself hath taught her. Not to you only, O people of Loch Diarmid; you have had the first-fruits, but the ingathering is not yet! Like those that have not long to be with you, we turn and cry—Repent! Repent, and be converted. You have waited long. And God has sent you prophets, miracles, and wonders, in your midst. And lo! your moment of privilege is nearly over, and He sends His servants forth. Repent! Oh, that my voice were a trumpet, that it might ring into your hearts! Oh, that it were as a rushing, mighty wind to sweep you to the Lord! We are going forth in His name. We are going out upon the world. Give us first-fruits—first-fruits for the Lord! Let us pray! Let us pray! Let us pray!"

Then the darkling mass rose to their feet, and the enthusiast poured forth his prayer. Sobs sounded out of the gloom as he went on, cries, less awful, but of the same character as his own—the faint, uncertain, flickering light adding ever another element of mystery and confusion to the extraordinary scene. Isabel, always clinging to the stout form of her stepmother, who listened and looked on with a curious, interested composure and placidity, could scarcely restrain herself from joining in the subdued outcries round her. By *degrees, time and place,* and all mortal restrictions,

vanished from her excited mind. It seemed to l
if she always had been, always must be in this
darkened, agitated place, torn by terrors and ec
of which she could give no explanation. She fel
self replaced in her seat, then raised again, as
and address alternated; but lost all reckoning of
was taking place, except as one great blank of e
ment raised to the pitch of fever. What rous
was Ailie's voice, once more soft, pleading, sympa
A voice that calmed her wild emotions, and b
her back in some degree to herself.

"I have wondered and wondered, and asked
Lord," said Ailie, "what for His gift of speakin
tongues should have come to me,—me that ke
thing, that had so little way of speaking fort
praise. But it has pleased Him to show me wh
aye says, that out o' the mouth o' babes and suc
His praise is perfected. Ye canna understand me
I speak what He puts into my mouth; and oh I
understand mysel! But out yonder," said the in
creature, a flush coming over her visionary fa
smile gleaming on her lips, "who can tell wha
perishing creatures would ken what it means?
after being a sign and a wonder to you, He'll
me to them a preacher in their ain tongue like
and the Apostles. Eh, that He should give His
to me so little worthy! But it's for your sakes!
oh!" said Ailie, turning upon them with outstr
hands, "are we to go out alone for such a worl
there none will come with us to prepare the w
the Lord, to make His paths straight? Is there
willing to leave houses and lands, and fathe
mother, and comfort and home, for His sake!

neebors! I ken one that's like the angels of the Lord! She wants faith, but she wants nothing else. She's wearying, wearying to be at hame with the Lord, and hasna the heart to rise up off her bed, and come forth wi' me to the salvation of men. You a' know her as well as me! Maybe it's Margaret's prayers that have brought the Spirit on this parish. Ye know how she has prayed for us up bye at the burn, wrestling wi' the Lord like Jacob. Eh, freends, if I had Margaret I would go forth light as the air! Lord, give her faith! Lord, raise her up! Lord, send thy blessed creature forth with us! Lord, Lord, listen, and give her faith! Oh, my freends, will ye no pray?"

At this moment Isabel's emotion became altogether uncontrollable. It seemed to herself as if the inspiration she had witnessed had suddenly come upon her. She held up her hands wildly out of her dark corner where no one could see. Then a scream burst from her lips.

"No," she cried out, in a voice so strained with passion that no one would have recognised it for hers. "No, no,—not for Margaret; she shall not live, she shall have her will. Leave her in peace, and let her die."

Isabel fell like a dead creature into her stepmother's arms, not unconscious, with all her senses still wildly vivid, but trembling like a leaf, and helpless as an infant. Then there was a moment of terrified silence, and heads soon turned timidly round in the darkness to search for the new prophet. Ailie, standing with her arms uplifted in sight of them all, gazed intently into the gloom with her great lambent eyes, waiting *and listening for some* moments after the voice

had ceased. Then the prophetess suddenly sank i
the girl by a transition so extraordinary that it ca
once more the wavering attention of the audie
attracted from her by the new miracle. Her arms f
by her side, a flood of tears came pouring from h
eyes.

"Oh, Lord, Lord, Lord! ye have never refused
before!" said Ailie, with a wild cry of reproach,
sank upon the floor in a burst of weeping so h
lessly natural and girl-like that the excited gr
around her gazed at each other in dismay.

"We've all heard it," said Mr. John, sudde
starting up, with quivering lips and a countenance
as death. "O Spirit! if ye be of the Lord, speak ag
if ye be of the devil, away, away! Begone to
father of lies that sent ye here! If ye be of the L
speak again!"

Isabel heard all, but her bodily powers had
saken her; she lay passive upon Jean Campb
shoulder, who, for her part scandalised by the "
posure," held her fast soothing her. "Oh, no a wo
no a word!" cried Jean; "let it no be said that on
the Miss Diarmids has gone after them, too!"

Even this whisper was almost audible in
intense silence that followed. Mr. John stood with
hand raised, himself like a ghost in the darkness w
the light of the candle flickering on his face.

"It's a lying spirit," he cried, "sent to tempt
Let us pray! let us pray!"

"It is the Lord!" said Ailie, in a voice cho
with weeping.

Her sobs were audible through all the wild supp
cation that followed. But Isabel, worn out, was o

re until she felt herself drawn into
saw the moonlight lying white upon

CHAPTER XIII.

le said upon the walk home. Isabel
austed to make any reply to the
f reproaches, and soothing speeches,
ccession by her stepmother.
into your head to speak out like
n glad naebody saw it was you. It
eart to hear them say the Captain's
ter them. Lean heavier, my lamb.
it the love and the contradiction in
t. Ye've never been drawn to me,
aye ane that kent ye had a warm

. would recommence her questions.
ttle attention to anything that was
ken the quieter path across the hill,
way of the people, who would no
d the meeting, and who it was that
shone so brightly that Jean felt her
e unfrequented path; or, rather, her
e of discovery was so great that she
its perils. The hill-road wound
Manse, and was but a path among
nough for a country cart, but sel-
foot-passengers. They were quite
was eerie; and the moonlight cast
upon the Loch, which lay under-
sheet of silver, visible all the way

down, until it glided into the Clyde through the row gateway formed by two green points. It lo smaller than by daylight, and shone, silent and gl like, in its black and white, like a picture on si The heather and the distant hills were black too, cept where those intense white lights fell on them; thing had any colour in it, except the vast, se blue sky.

"The wonder was, not that I spoke, but that kept silent. Oh, how could you hear all yon," Isabel, "and keep still?"

"Me!" cried Jean. "What had I to do with th I wasna there to mix myself up in their ways. A I was minding what nonsense they might say!"

"Then why did ye go and listen?" said Isabel

It seemed to her stepmother a question so premely irrelevant that she made no attempt to swer.

"I'm awfu' sorry I took you," she said. " had thought you would have paid so much a tion — But, eh, if a body was to mind them like what do you think would become of this wo Whisht! there's naebody coming. It's as light as and we're no far from hame. What would becom the world," repeated Jean, who was a little ner herself upon the lonely, unfrequented road, and t bled at the rustling of the heather and breathing the night upon the braes, "if a'body's was praying preaching and gaun on like *yon?* Ye see, it cou be. The weans would a' run wild, and the m meat be wasted; and a man without his meat is li boat without a sail. A miracle now and then m

be a grand thing; but if there was to be naething but miracles it would be an awfu' strange world."

"Oh, but it would be like heaven!"

"I dinna pretend to ken that muckle about heaven," said Jean, "but I'm thinking our bodies, and the meat and the claes, would be an awfu' burden to us there. You'll think it queer, but this world's mair familiar; and seeing the Lord has kept it a' up this thousands and thousands o' years, ane would think He would ken what suited us best."

Thus they went on clinging to each other along the white line of road between the dark rustling whinbushes and tough stalks of heather which caught at their dresses as they passed. When the light in her own low window at last appeared, a very fervent "God be thanked" burst from Jean Campbell's lip. "I canna face thae awfu' lonely roads. Ye never ken wha ye mayna meet, face to face," she said as the cottage became fully visible, her soul encouraged by the sight of it. But Jean herself was nowise aware how she had summed up the mysterious sensations of the night. At such a moment you might have met any one living or dead, distant or present, in the solitude of that pathway across the hill.

To go out of the magic, significant night, silent with such excess of meaning, into the absolute stillness of the little parlour, all grey and brown, with its one window shuttered and curtained, and the two candles twinkling solemnly on the table, and Margaret dozing in her chair, was the strangest contrast. The clock was still ticking steadfastly as if it never would stop, through and through the house; little Mary, with very *large wide open eyes, sat on* a footstool opposite Mar-

garet, from whom she never removed her anxious gaze. "She's been dozing and waking, dozing and waking," said Mary; "and eh, but ye've been lang, lang!"

"It was a lang meeting the night," said Jean. "But what way have ye closed up the window, and Margaret sae fond of the view? I would have gotten an awfu' fright to see a' dark if we had come round by the Loch."

"It was like as if something terrible might come and look in," said little Mary, with a shudder. And then Margaret, roused by the stir, opened her feverish bright eyes and asked what news.

"You've been long," she said. "And were ye as pleased as you thought you would be, Isabel?"

Isabel had taken off her bonnet and pushed back the hair from her aching forehead. She looked up at her sister with the intention of replying, and then suddenly overpowered, hid her face in her hands and burst into tears.

"Ah, she may well cry," said Jean. "If I was ever mair shamed in my life! Isabel, the Captain's daughter, and a lady born!—She was that led away, Margaret, that she spoke like the rest."

Isabel gave her stepmother an indignant warning look, and then rose, throwing aside her cloak, and placed herself behind Margaret's chair out of reach of those eyes which she could not bear.

"Isabel—spoke—like the rest! I cannot understand," said Margaret faintly. "Are you meaning that it came upon her—in power?" And the invalid turned round wistful and wondering. Could it be that God had passed over her in her suffering and given this gift to Isabel? Perhaps, for the first time, there came

much of that strange, wondering envy
riends had already felt in her behalf.
ontent that Ailie should have the pri-
herself. But Isabel! She turned and
: with her eyes, wandering. "It is be-
worthy," she said to herself, but not

em that were speaking of you," said
ou wanted faith; and that we were to
you were to be made to arise and go
e to convert the world. It made me
aa sit still and keep silence. I cried
l have her will. It's not for you to
i Mr. John said, it was a lying spirit,
he Lord; and then I mind no more!"
Isabel," said Margaret, with a smile of
arness; "it was true love that spoke and
But she's not to go there again—neither
le Mary. It can do them nothing but

ne no harm that I ken," said Jean.
iting whiles; but I never find myself the

ifferent from these young things," said
it, oh! you'll always mind—both of you
wish you should not go there. I'm not
it for the present. After—when I'll,
e here to speak—you'll both mind."
our bed this moment, bairn," cried Jean,
ance of grief, "sitting glowering at Mar-
e big e'en! but mind ye dinna waken my
oing up the stair. It's getting late, and
in our beds after such a night."

"I am very comfortable," said Margaret. "I am not disposed to move. I'm better here than in my bed, with that glimmer of the fire. I was always fond of a fire. It's like a kindly spirit with its bits of flames, crackling and chattering. I have it in my mind to speak to you both, if you'll have patience and listen. Don't contradict me, Isabel. I know I am going fast, and why should you say no? But it would be a real comfort to speak and tell you what I wish before I die."

"O, Margaret! anything but that," cried Isabel.

The invalid shook her head with an expression of pain. "Nothing but this," she said; "if you want to cross me, and vex me, and drive me to be silent, it's in your power: but my sister will never do that. I must speak, if you would leave my heart at rest. Dry your eyes, Isabel. I'm selfish, but ye must yield to it. If it was you that were going, would not your heart burn to speak before you left to them you hold dear? and to-night you must think not of yourself, but of me."

Jean had drawn the stool upon which her child had been seated towards the waning fire. She had taken out her handkerchief and dried her eyes with it, and turned her face towards her stepdaughter. It was not in the good woman's nature to strive against an evident fact as poor Isabel did. She had long ago acknowledged to herself that Margaret was dying; and it was natural she should wish to give them such clear evidence of her happy frame of mind as should be edifying to the whole parish—and the "good advice" that comes from dying lips is so doubly precious. Jean looks upon it as reasonable people in her class are wont

look, as a natural and seemly accompaniment of the situation. "Come and see how a Christian can die; and oh, guard against sin and vanity, and think how poor all your pleasures will look when you come to a dying bed!" This was the kind of address which she expected from Margaret.

She dried her eyes, but kept her handkerchief in readiness for further weeping, and composed herself to go through this solemn but necessary scene with that curious rigid sense of the fit and becoming which is at once so conventional and so real in her class. And then there were "worldly affairs" also to settle, though Jean was ashamed to confess even to herself, that she was capable of thinking of these. Except her own children, she loved no one so well as these two, whom she had watched over the greater part of their lives; but yet it would cost Margaret but a "scrape of the pen" to secure Jamie's education, which was his mother's highest desire in this world; and Isabel would never miss it. With all these motives of interest in her mind, Jean affected no reluctance to listen to what she was content to receive as her stepdaughter's dying words,—and yet there was nothing that could have been proposed to her that she would not have done to save Margaret, or even to spare her an hour's suffering.

Isabel's feelings were of a very different kind. It seemed to her as if this night in her passion she had given up Margaret, and her eager longing to contradict herself, and to refuse once more to believe in the hopelessness of her sister's position, was met as by a stone wall, by the awful *thought*, that her impetuous *words had not been her own*, but dictated to her by

God. The struggle within her was indescribable. Had she stood out against that impulse, had she "wrestled" with God according to the phraseology she was so habituated to hear, for Margaret's life, might not she have saved her sister? And she had given her up instead. In her impatience, and opposition, and pride, she had sacrificed Margaret. Oh! what if God had been tempting her as He was said to tempt the wavering and prove them? And she had chosen her own impetuous way to contradict the others, instead of beating down her pride and importuning Him on her knees, with their help, to undo all He had been doing, and heal by a miracle. What use was there in praying or struggling now when she had let the one opportunity, the moment of grace, thus pass from her—when she had accepted the wild suggestion, and given her consent that Margaret must die? Had she been her sister's murderer, Isabel's heart could scarce have beat more wildly. God was to her as a juggler, who had given her a chance and hidden it from her until it was rejected. "I canna listen, I canna understand, my heart's broken!" she said, throwing herself into her father's old arm-chair in the corner. It was out of the way, almost out of sight; and at that distance, wrapping herself up in silence and reserve, allowing herself no look, nor word, nor touch of tenderness, she might live it out, and satisfy Margaret. No other way was it possible. It was a strange group: the room so poorly lighted, with the two candles on the table the fire smouldering in the grate, dying into dull embers; Margaret laid out on her invalid chair supported by pillows, her pale face absorbing all the light there was; Jean sitting crouched together on the stool

with her honest, comely countenance, serious now and full of anxiety, turned to her stepdaughter; and Isabel in her chair apart against the wall, as if she were not one of them—her face visible only in profile—her hands hanging listless in her lap—her eyes cast down. The dying girl, who did not understand it, was wounded by her sister's withdrawal; and yet what did it matter? —perhaps it left her more free to speak than if Isabel's tender eyes had been searching out the meaning in her face before she could utter it? Even the irritation and half-estrangement of a grief too poignant to be submissive, Margaret could understand.

"I am thinking most of Bell," she said. "I've always thought most of Bell. It was natural. There were but the two of us in the world. And I've always been a woman, you'll mind. When she was but a bairn playing on the hill-side, I was like her mother. That was my nature; and now the sorest thought I have is to leave her without a guide in this hard world."

Isabel could not speak—but she made a hasty, deprecating gesture with her hand.

"You would say, no," said Margaret; "but, Isabel, I know best. I am not vaunting myself, but I know best. For a while past you've been that you did not understand yourself. Your heart has been breaking to part with me, and yet you could not bear the sight of me. It is wearying to everybody when a poor creature takes so long to die. Oh, Bell, dinna say a word! Do you think I doubt you? I'm speaking of nature. And when I'm gone—so young as you are, and so hasty, and so feeling;—*you've* been a trouble to your*self and a mystery already*, and what will you be

then, with none near you to turn it all over in t minds?"

"If there's only me," said Isabel, gazing into vacant air before her, "who will care?"

"I'll care wherever I am," said Margaret. " you canna think I could be happy in heaven, and bonnie Bell in pain or sorrow. If you could but har your heart against the movements that come and g if ye would but take patience and think before put your hand to aught. You were aye so hasty so innocent. Do you mind when Robbie Spence into the Loch, and her after him in a boat befo man could move?"

"Ay, do I," said Jean, "and our ain Jamie w he broke his arm——"

"It was Isabel that carried him home, that laddie!" said Margaret with pathetic smiles and te "aye hasty, though she was so young and so sli but there's worse danger than that. Ye might t burdens upon you that would be harder to carry. my bonnie Bell! if I could but have seen you i good man's hands!"

"I'll not hear you speak," cried Isabel, aln wildly; "am I wanting any man?"

"If you would promise to take thought before made up your mind," said Margaret; "I'm no my when I think of my Isabel in trouble. If you wc go to your room, and take a while to think. I ca tell what's beyond the veil, nor what's permitted *yon* but, Bell, I would aye promise you this—not to *ap* to be a terror to you. But if you would take tim think, and shut to your door, and say to your 'Margaret loved me well. She's been dead and g

ears, but she couldna forget her sister
. What would Margaret say if she
nd, Bell, I promise you this—not to
appear like one coming from the dead,
r and let you know what I'm thinking.
ermitted—I canna tell."
ret! Margaret! I will die too," cried
y throwing herself at her sister's feet;
more."
s plenty more to bear," said her sister,
ad which was buried in her coverings.
t out of the world like that. It is me
sy task. I have but to bide quiet and
-me that took pride in being the wisest
. able to guide you. And it is you that
bear. But, Bell, it's a promise—you'll
time comes? I will not say, Take this
t, for the heart is free. But take thought,
ny darling, take thought; and I'll al-
. my opinion, not in your ear like the
bound in the flesh—but into your heart.
e added, raising herself a little, with a
in her voice, "I have but two or three
say."
not move nor speak. She had her face
erlid as if she were weeping. But she
Her eyes were blazing, covered by her
ars, parched with drought, almost fiery
her heart beat with the violence of a
e fullest height of life. But no one saw
avings; she knelt there with her face
nly her soft hair, which had fallen into
n reach of Margaret's hectic hand.

"You'll aye take care of her as long as may be," Margaret went on addressing Jean. "When she's older she'll understand. It is just that all should be hers,—everything we have; but she'll not depart from my desire about Jamie, you may be sure of that. And, Isabel, you'll no rebel, but let her be good to you, all her days. And be a good sister to the bairns. I'm real foolish," she went on, with a smile; "as if me being away would make such a change—I'm real vain. But you'll no blame me, you two."

"Blame you!" said Jean, with her handkerchief to her eyes; "O Margaret, you're ower thoughtfu'; but it was that the callant should be bred for a minister? that was what you meant?"

"If he turns his mind to it," said Margaret. "And I think that is all. You'll be good to *her*, Bell, and she'll be good to you. And keep little Mary out of the meetings. She's very keen and bright, brighter than Jamie. You'll not let her go astray. And be kind to everybody for my sake," Margaret said with a smile, which touched the very extremity of self-control, and had a certain flicker almost of delirium in it—"I am fit for no more."

CHAPTER XIV.

During the week that ensued various events happened in the parish which kept up the local excitement. The prophets, who up to this time had been in external subjection to the authorities, at the first mention of restriction had thrown off all bonds. Mild as was the attempted control it was more than they would

bear, and no sooner had they thus emancipated themselves from all habitual restraint than their higher pretensions began to develope.

The intimation that Ailie was about to set out on a mission to the general world could not but be exciting information to the parish; and at the same time there was an arrival of pilgrims from that outer world to inquire into the marvel. Commissions of investigation had already come from the Presbytery of the district, and even from Edinburgh and Glasgow, the news having spread quickly at a moment of general religious excitement; but the inquirers from England, one of whom was soon discovered to be "an English minister," produced a more marked impression, and thrilled the Loch with indescribable pride. Though all united in this sense of modest complacency, there were many discussions and much controversy in the parish. The strange thing in the midst of them, was a thing which nobody could be indifferent to; and while all the adherents of the new light stood in one compact united body, their opponents were in two camps and had little in common. One half of them were the so well-named Moderates, people who thought religion a very respectable adjunct to life, to be produced on Sundays and at times of bereavement, and on other notable occasions, but who considered it an impertinence to have any feeling on the subject beyond that of dignified respect. The other half were reasonable people, who sympathized in the piety, the earnestness, the zeal of the prophets, but did not believe in their miraculous powers.

Common sense, being thus divided into bands, had, as was to be supposed, little chance against the *intense emotion and wild sense* of absolute right which

distinguished the extreme party. There were meetings held in every corner of the parish in this exciting week at which Ailie made known her intention, and called upon her disciples to pray for enlightenment to her and especially for clearer direction what part of the world she was to turn to. That her "tongue" was the language of some distant country she was convinced—and that were she but directed on this point her path would be clear before her. In all other respects her mind was made up. She was going forth as the Apostles did without scrip or shoes. Her enthusiasm saw nothing appalling—nothing extraordinary in the thought.

"The Lord can make a simple lass stronger than an armed man," she would say, with her visionary eyes gleaming; and it may be supposed how little weight against this inspired creature had suggestions of prudence. She wrought her audience to an amount of belief in her, and expectation in respect to her work, which might have produced wilder results still, but for another event going on by the side of this which exercised almost as strong a spiritual restraint on the district as Ailie's enthusiasm excited it. This was the dying of Margaret Diarmid, an operation so slow, so gradual, and so universally known, that the entire Loch seemed to assist at the great spectacle. Nothing of the kind could have happened in a more conventional community; but in this primitive patriarchal country such an event affected all.

Margaret was sinking day by day. She had made her last step on the grass, taken her last draught of the fresh mountain air out of doors. From day to day it seemed impossible that she should ever again totter from

e other; and yet she managed to do it,
hold upon her domestic place with a
unlike the feebleness of her hold upon
es, indeed, she had to be carried to the
lour, from which she could still gain a
e Loch, and feel herself one of the
ıe would not relinquish this last strong-
ıce. "It will be time enough to shut me
gone," she would say, smiling upon
doctor's orders had been that she should
in everything. "Nothing can harm her
said, with that mournful abandonment
which shows the death of hope. And
ıay, "the whole Loch," held its breath
L
ıh a tragedy as thrills human nature in
and circumstances—a kind of typical
and spotless, and sweet, a little raised
re the common level and immeasurably
haracter, a holy maid, whose story of
ıg and intercession and counsel, was in
Whisht, bairns," the Presbyterian mother
ɔrn iconoclast and to whom a Saint Mar-
Church would have been the direst offence,
o her children; "whisht, bairns, or go
Here's where Margret comes to pray."
argret, maiden Margret, was about to ac-
: death, that last scene so full of uni-
t, and so fascinating to human curiosity,
of all. Her death-bed was as visible to
speak, as was the cottage on the hill, in
taking place. "Did ye hear what Mar-
night?" one passenger would say to an-

other on the road. Even in the smithy a certain subdued tone would fall on the men, when one of them asked, "Do ye ken if there is any news of Margret at the Glebe?"

Unconscious words of hers like feathered seed were floating all about the Loch. Her little parlour was a resort to which the whole neighbourhood went to pay its homage with that open, undisguised curiosity as to the words and looks of the dying, which belongs to a peasant population everywhere.

"It's but natural we should a' want to see her. She's on her death-bed, ye ken," said the women in the village; "And ye couldna see a greater sight," Jenny Spence added with mournful pride. "I would bring a' the world to see her if I had my will." Ministers from other parishes would visit Mr. Lothian for the express purpose of being introduced to Margret's presence-chamber. Even "the English minister," who had come to inquire into the tongues, sought that privilege, and came out of the Glebe Cottage after it with oily conventional thanksgivings, but a real tear in the corner of his eye. The importance of the event thus taking place before them kept the parish from abandoning its wits altogether in the other excitement. The dying saint kept the living prophets in check.

And Margaret for the first time accepted the homage that was done her. She lay on her sofa in something of that soft stupor and fascination which is said to lessen the pains of death in some cases of a violent exit from the world. Hers was the reverse of violent; but yet Death so charmed her as he approached that pain seemed to depart along with hope. She lay in a *strange* calm, ready to see whosoever approached her,

tors with her faint smile, answering
far as her strength permitted, some-
a tender word of spontaneous utter-

eal happy in your mind; ye're sure
O, Margaret, there's nae clouds or
you!" the visitors would say, gazing
man curiosity into that twilight which
rlasting night. Sometimes she only
eply; sometimes she would answer to
nswers like those strange words in
say all for the well-being of the in-
row no light upon the darkling way
must tread for himself. Sometimes,
weary, she would "wander" in her
nur her broken thoughts half aloud;
in the parish that if Margaret was
she was *herself*, she spoke like an
ren when her mind was thus confused

was that good to her, that she was
bairn," the women said with tears.
affected the entire country-side.
it seemed to her that she lived in
n. The vague terror that had been
so long had settled down, and could
ped; it seemed years to her since the
ad believed it might not be,—or at
it might have been delayed. As for
ory, that might have happened ages
by her feelings. In the early days,
eard the pebble strike against the
lover's whistle on the hill, a strange

sense of something out of date came over her. A
when that stopped,—and for days together there
no mention of him,—Isabel would go back into
heart by moments and gather her relics together,
think of Stapylton as of some one long lost, whom
should never see again. Sometimes her heart quicke
into one great pulsation like a sob, when she he
his voice at the door asking, as everybody asked,
Margaret. "It's kind of him to mind—so long,"
said to herself. With Margaret she had gone into
valley of the shadow of death, and its first effect
been, or seemed to have been, to quench out all
personal identity. Her impetuous soul was hush
her eager heart stilled. And constant watching,
the want of regular sleep, had rapt her into
curious exalted condition of body which nature's hu
for rest, and the impossibility of taking it, produc
all watchers. She was half asleep and half insens
many an hour when she sat by Margaret in her
of weariness. The fascination of death worked
her almost as it did upon her sister. She went
a silenced creature, feeling upon her the mesmeric
fluence of the lion which was about to make its sp
They were going through that dark valley, the
sisters together, hand in hand as they had gone
their birth; and one would never emerge from
shadow. What was to become of the other—if
life was to terminate in its shade, or continue as
dream, or blot itself out like something too faint
continue, Isabel could not tell. The power of the
seemed to be taken from her; all that perplexing
tion of a life beyond which had driven her wild
self-disgust, and yet thrilled her with involuntary

tion, went out of her like an extinguished light. To remember when Margaret should have her cordial—when she should be made to swallow the wine which kept her alive a little longer—which was the hour for the draught that soothed her cough—and which for the reluctant mouthful of food which sustained her strength, was all that Isabel was capable of. She was rapt up in this feverish routine of little occupations as in the rhythm of some spell which stupified her. People came and went, but she scarce saw or heard them. She could not remember afterwards, though she racked her brain to recall them, the words which her sister said to herself. The wine, and the medicine, and the cordial, and the spoonful of something which it was her highest object on earth to make Margaret swallow; her feverish doze and feverish waking, which went on without distinction of night from day, or day from night—to this had come Isabel's impetuous life. Her stepmother was continually by her side to help, and entreated her with tears in her eyes to take rest and food.

"You'll kill yourself too, and then what will become of us?" said Jean.

But even that thought did not rouse the girl. "You are not her only sister like me," she would answer drearily, resuming always the same strange stupifying round.

Perhaps it was because Jean Campbell, too, was in something of the same stupor of exhausted nature, produced by constant watching and want of sleep, that one visitor, whom they had guarded against for days, found his way to Margaret's bedside. The children had been *set to watch on the road*, to warn the cottage if

the very shadow of Mr. John fell upon the hill, and had repeatedly brought back news of him, which set the watchers on their guard. But, as it happens so often when such a watch goes on for days, there came a moment when the little scouts thought of something else, and when all other visitors were absent, and the road left open for the enemy. Jean had withdrawn to her kitchen while Margaret slept, or seemed to sleep—and had thrown herself, worn out, into the great arm-chair covered with checked linen, where she nodded by the fire. Isabel sat at the foot of the sofa, with her eyes on her sister. And those eyes, too, were veiled by the drooping eyelids, in the fatigue and awful tedium of the protracted watch. The afternoon was darkening, the gloaming had almost come; but it was better to keep silent, even in the dark, than to move and wake Margaret from anything that looked like sleep. Thus the anxious household slumbered at its post, overtaken by weariness and security. How long the doze lasted none of them could tell, but when some faint movement of her sister's made Isabel start from her insensibility, it froze the blood in her heart, and almost woke her to positive exertion, to see the man they all feared seated by the sofa on which Margaret lay. He had lifted the latch, and come in noiselessly, while they all slept in their exhaustion. There was still light enough to show his dark face, gazing intently upon the white vision on the sofa. All the hectic had gone from Margaret's cheek. She was as pale as if the end had already come, and lay with her blue-veined eyelids ajar, as it were, the long lashes a little raised from the white cheeks, the pale lips parted with her painful breath. Mr. John sat by the side of the sofa,

r her like a destroying angel. Had it
nself in person, the sight could scarcely
e startling. His countenance was work-
ne with suppressed but violent emotion,
ioving, his eyes fixed intently upon the
eper. He had stretched out one hand
s couch, not touching her, like one who
tion or enforced a command. Isabel sat
paralyzed by the sight. There seemed
ır to stir or speak. And Margaret still
ometimes uneasily under that gaze, which
of penetrating the insensibility of death,
osing her liquid, half-seen eyes, or giv-
f consciousness. By degrees, half-audible
o drop from the prophet's lips.
!" Isabel could hear him say. "My life
salvation for her life!"
on in him gradually became less con-
vas with God he was struggling, with a
desire which left no room for reason or
After a while, he slid downwards upon
'ays noiseless in the supreme urgency of
He held his hand up over the couch,
ıe painful attitude with a rigidity beyond
ower.
ıt let Thee go, till Thou bless her,—till
:!" Isabel heard him say.
ppeared suddenly before her, awaking out
There was not a sound in the house,
ck ticking through all with its monotonous,
, and Margaret's irregular breathing, now
ower, a fitful human accompaniment. At
ır of self-control could go no further.

"Rise, rise, woman beloved!" he cried, hoarsely, springing to his feet. "I've won you out of the hands of Death!"

The harsh agony of the cry woke Margaret. He was standing between her and the faint light from the window, bending down over her from his great height with outstretched arms; his face invisible in the darkness which was made doubly dark by his shadow. Thus suddenly called back from her temporary oblivion, she woke with a little start. "Isabel!" she said, instinctively. And then in a moment it became apparent to Margaret that another ordeal had come to her worse than the paroxysms of failing breath or palpitating heart in which Isabel could help her. With an instinctive thought for her sister, she raised herself slightly upon her pillows. "My dear, my dear, you're not to blame," said Margaret, with a little moan. She had hoped to get out of the world without this trial, but now that it had come it must be borne.

"She is not to blame," said Mr. John. "Nobody is to blame. I came stealing in like a thief in the night: they shut me out from you as if I would harm you—I that am ready to give my life for you. Margaret, arise! I've won you out of the hands of Death!"

"Oh, if you would not waste this madness on me!" said Margaret. "Isabel, let him stay. Death thinks no shame and feels no fear. I'm glad that I can speak to him before I go. John Diarmid, dinna drive me wild. This life is no so grand a gift that I should seek it out of your hands. God's will is more to me than your will. Sit down by my death-bed; and oh, *man, be silent, if ye have any heart! It's for me to speak now.*"

rhat you will,—whatever you will," he
:! if you will but listen to the Lord's
up and live! Can I stand by and see

atient sigh burst from Margaret's breast.
" she said, "once before, and took all
l the sweetness out of life. For once I
have been proud, but it's not the time
O, John Diarmid, it is fit it should be
:all me back to life as you call it! I
ve upbraided you—no, not by a word.
settled you were never to come here.
speak before I die."

e cried, going down upon his knees with
mission in his great frame. "Say what
i vile to all and vilest to you. You are
Margaret, Margaret! But take the life
you and never see me more."

you have won!" said Margaret, with a
any other voice would have been disdain.
was like that of a dove, and had no notes

Yet soft as the approach to contempt
girl was remorseful of it. "I must not
," she said; "and you must not speak to
irit in me, and me so near the pleasant
isht! I canna think shame now, though
to hear. John Diarmid, once I was as
u as now——"

gh hating me!" he said, with a great sob
oice.

'm nigh being free of all the bonds of
id Margaret. "I was little more than a

bairn; I was like Bell. They said you m
harm; but I never thought you meant me har

As the pathetic voice went on John Diarmi
his head lower and lower till at last he sank
on the floor by the side of the sofa. It was
words that brought him to this abject self-hun
He knew better than she did. A groan bur
the man's labouring breast. Even Isabel—sitt
trance at her sister's feet, roused up out of he
her cheeks burning with a wild flush of jealo
shame, half wild that Margaret had descend
her saintly pedestal to avow the emotions of ea
furious to think that any man had shared her
yet felt an unwilling movement of pity for the
sinner. Margaret only, continued without any

"I never thought you meant me harm," s
once more smiting with the awful rod of her i
the man at her feet. "But when I heard w
had been, and what you had done, the light
of the world. I am not blaming you. It was
gave me my death, and not man; but from t
I had no heart to live. Why should a wom
to live, and fight against all the unseen power
this world's so sore-defiled, and not a spot that
set her foot on,—no one that she can trust? F
had no heart to struggle more."

A certain note of plaintive self-consciousn
come into the steady voice, broken only by w
with which Margaret told her tale, as if it
history so long past that all emotion had die
it. And so it was. Her almost love had fade
heart, but there still remained a sense of pit
young forlorn creature whose eyes had been thu

Margaret had half forgotten that it was

oment in her abstraction, in her deadly
well-nigh cruel. She took no notice of
lay abject at her feet, with his face to
Her great spiritual eyes in those pale
pproaching death had hollowed out, gazed
the darkness. Perhaps it was the con-
ent of the prostrate figure by her which
ast. Suddenly she stirred, and, putting
n hand, laid it softly on his bowed head.
l," she said, softly, "are you walking
?"

her hand, raising his head from where
nelt upright by her, pressing it to his
heaved violently as with sobs. What
as in his heart, what sudden knowledge
at remorse, no one could say. It was
y were to each other as ghosts in the
ret could see his gestures, but nothing
d, anything more could have been learnt
head and hidden countenance. Her voice
d softer when she broke the silence

ou're moved to the heart," she said. "I
ng you *now*. You are changed, and I
nged. And if you would but tell me
more such thoughts in your heart, and
walking with God,—then I would feel
e prayers answered before I die."

prayed for me, Margaret!" he cried.
man was subdued to a child. His great
ken by sobs; his eyes were wet with

tears. He had not another word to say; his passion, his inspiration, all the prophetic pretensions which clothed him, had vanished like so many cobwebs. He knelt by the purest love of his life with a heart broken and speechless. She dying, and he without power to save.

"Ay!" she said, laying her hand once more upon his head; and then there was silence broken only by the groan or sob that came from John Diarmid's heart. Darkness covered the group in which the supremest of human emotions were working so strongly. They looked like spectres hidden in the silence and the gloom; yet there was life at its last struggle, always most powerful, most sublime at the moment before its ending; and love in its great anguish, heart parting from heart. All that was fictitious, all that was out of nature, had floated away at the touch of Margaret's dying hand. Isabel sank on her knees too, and wept—she knew not why; and thus one awful silent moment passed over the three; or rather life and time stood still to leave room for one last encounter and farewell.

The next minute familiar sounds and sights broke in. Jean Campbell, with a candle in her hand, came pushing open the closed door. "Eh, you're in the dark, like craws in the mist," she said, as she approached.

At the sound of her voice John Diarmid sprang to his feet, rising like a giant out of the darkness. He bent down his head suddenly over Margaret, pressed his motionless lips to her forehead, with a movement of despair, which was no kiss, and passing the astonished woman who held up her candle to look at him, rushed

rind, letting the night and the chill air
nged forth.
Jean might have stood spell-bound by
ut for this sudden puff of cold air which
flame of her candle, it is impossible to
vas roused instantly by fear of the cold
nd ran in haste to close the doors.
loon!" she cried, as she came back,
uch sense as to think the cauld would
, Isabel, how could you let him in to
as a' my fault dovering and sleeping in
r lamb, ye're weariet to death?"
near to death," said Margaret, with a
ere's nobody to blame; and I'm glad I
last."
s he didna drive you distracted wi' his
. his miracles," said Jean, looking anx-
stful eyes from one to another. Isabel
er stepmother's entrance, and drying the
r cheeks, hastily began to arrange the
her sister; she shrank from Jean's look,
somehow to blame, and angry at the
had the other watcher been awake this
t have come to Margaret. But, as for
elf, she made no effort to avoid Jean's
ack on her pillows panting sometimes for
a humid softness about her great shining
uivering smile on her lips. Very nearly
; and yet ever patient, waiting till a little
chieve the end.
ad to see him at the last," she repeated;
n said to me that I must do it, I would
and resisted. But now that it has come

without our doing, I am glad. He is not so ill as folk think."

"Folk think him a prophet frae heaven!" said Jean, whose curiosity to know what had passed grew greater and greater, "and it's no doubt as a prophet he found his way in here."

"Then he's not so good as folk think," said Margaret, "not so good and not so ill; but craving for he knows not what, and torn by good and evil that are struggling for him. I'm glad to have seen him at the last."

And all the evening through she lay musing with her eyes open and awake, taking no notice of her anxious attendants. If ever Isabel through all the weary time of watching was angry with her sister it was this night. To think that Margaret, so pure and holy, and knowing this man what he was, could yet think of him, let her mind rest upon him!—it seemed a desecration to Isabel. But Jean, who was older, understood better.

"Whatever may be said against him—and there's plenty to say—he was awfu' fond o' our Margret," she said, wiping her eyes with her apron, "and who was to forbid the innocent thing to be fond o' him? Na, Isabel lass! though a lad may be unworthy, ye canna break heart's love like a cotton thread. And if she's praying for him in her mind, bless her! are we to complain?"

But whether she prayed—or whether she did but muse in the quiet of that immense stillness which preceded death, of all the wonderful might-have-been that lay behind her, Margaret said not a word. And the name of John Diarmid was never heard from her lips again.

CHAPTER XV.

When Mr. John rushed from the door of the Glebe Cottage mad with grief and sorrow and a sense of impotence, it was not to return to his home or to enter upon any of his usual duties, even such as might have seemed akin to the passion and excitement in his mind. He went up the hill-side without knowing where he went, rushing into the clouds and rain which were sweeping across the invisible braes. There had been a pause in the deluge when he had stolen into Margaret's parlour—the shrine of her sanctity; but now the storm had recommenced. The rain beat in his face as he emerged into the outer world; the wind buffeted him as if it would have thrown him down; the trees on the opposite side of the way shook all their rustling heavy boughs at him in the darkness. To himself he seemed pursued, driven forth, defied and isolated by all nature. Was it that he had killed her? He had taken from her, she said, all heart to struggle against her fate. He had murdered Margaret; and notwithstanding all the supernatural signs in which he trusted, his power had failed him at her bedside. Her soft words had paralyzed him—the wild prayers he had been uttering had been taken out of his very mouth; all his trust in himself, in his own emotions, in the change that had passed upon him, had been overthrown. Was he truly a better man than he had once been? He demanded an answer hotly from himself as he rushed on he knew not whither in the face of the wind and rain, struggling forward, and feeling a certain satisfaction in the struggle, up *the hill.*

And he did not answer, as he might have done that through all his wickedness and his righteousness the time when he was a reprobate, and the time when he was a prophet, he had been pursuing neither vice nor virtue, but excitement, emotion, the keen sensations which were life to him. He was not sufficiently enlightened to see so much as that. He considered the question not as a matter of temperament, but as a matter of guilt. As he inquired into his own motives, fierce answers rose up against him. No, he had not served God for God's sake, but for his own; to get the things he craved; to have power to do miracles and wonders; to sway and move the people round him; to feel that the high heaven was touched by his prayers; and, above all, to save Margaret, the creature whom he loved. He had loved her with hopes of winning her love; and then he had loved her with the bitter love of one who feels that he himself has revolted from him the rising affection; and now he had to stand by impotent and feel that he could not save her, that he was as nothing in her life!

Even at this moment the thought galled him beyond all expression. Had she been dying for him, he could have borne it; had she accused him, there would have been a certain consolation in the sense that he was thus important to her. But he was nothing to her. She spoke to him out of her calm with the voice of one who had long escaped from any influence of his. Nothing to her! less than nothing! Not able for a second to impose upon her that estimate of his own power which he held himself; not able to excite or move her—a solemn, saintly, dying creature, whom nothing he said could rouse either into hope or despair. His heart had

er self-abandonment under the humilia-
der words and soft admonitions; but now
ne to think, a different impression came
he had been able to disturb her as he
re,—if her heart had failed her while he
had felt that it was he who had the mas-
agitation which now raged in his heart
en less violent. The dark waters of Loch
nmering just before him ere he arrested
had climbed and descended the hill with-
how; he was drenched to the skin, beaten
wild, half crazed with the multitude of
all his new-born sense of power, all his
his changed condition, were gone. He
andoned by hope, and at the same time
aken of the Lord.

had stopped short, John Diarmid stood,
know how long, gazing into the night.
was the pale glimmer of the Loch before
es running high and breaking against the
g a salt spray into his face along with the
shadow of the great hills opposite gloom-
on him with crushing awful shadows. Be-
nd them, he knew well how dark was the
er, how deep, and wild, and subject to
man were to go half-a-dozen steps further,
much, down the steep rocky beach, the
e that the Clyde pouring its tide up into
of the hills, would suck him down and out
that no one would ever be the wiser for
ion of all troubles. The thought passed
mind with all the distinctness of a thing
ppen. Ten minutes buffeting perhaps in

the wild water, then silence and quiet, and only a white passive speck tossed about at the pleasure of the waves. The tide was going out, the strong current setting seaward. A drowned creature might be driven by Arran before the morning,—out into the Atlantic, where never human eye should light on it till the sea gave up its dead. How the black waves would suck it away, and play with the passive thing, as with a log upon the water! and no one would be the wiser. He never knew how long he stood with the rain beating on him, and the spray dashing salt into his face; but when he came to himself he had turned his back on that scene, and was rushing wildly along, not even by the road, but through the heather, to Loch Diarmid once more.

It had been not quite six o'clock when he left the Glebe. It was nearly midnight now when he forced his way through the tough stalks of the heather, crushing them down with his feet, stumbling into the forests of whins, going wildly through the yellowing brachens. Wild creatures rushed out of their coverts as he crossed the braes; it was too dark to see any path, even had he cared to confine himself to it. All was silent and black when he drew near the first inhabited place, the little cluster of cottages above the Manse to which he directed his steps. It was there that Ailie Macfarlane, his co-adjutrix and predecessor, lived with her father and mother. Not a light was visible in any window. The little congregation of souls, wrapt in the kind protecting darkness, slept and took no note of all the surrounding mysteries of the night. Mr. John went up to Ailie's door and knocked, waking echoes which seemed to go over all the parish, and rousing the dogs

at Lochhead out of the light sleep of their vigilance. It was some time before he had any reply. Then the lattice window, which was on a level with the door, was softly opened. It was Ailie herself who looked out, her fair locks braided about her head like a saint in a picture.

"Who are ye? what do ye want?" she said, with a certain anxiety in her voice. "Is it a summons to me too?"

Mr. John was too much pre-occupied to observe what she said, but he discerned the signs of some emotion, and took it for fear.

"Fear me not," he said, "I've come, from wrestling with the Lord upon the hill—and, Ailie, I have a message from Him to you. Fear me not."

"I'm fearing nothing," said the girl, with momentary surprise—for even had she not been protected by her exceptional character, to speak with "a friend" from a chamber window, even in the middle of the night, was counted no sin on Loch Diarmid. "I'm fearing nothing," she repeated, steadily, "but my heart's sore and my een are heavy. Say quick what you have to say."

But she was still perfectly calm when he crossed the paling of the little garden and came close to the sill of the window at which she stood. He was without and she within; but they were near enough to speak low, and even to touch each other. Ailie drew the shawl in which she was wrapped closer round her and shivered in the night air; but did not tremble at the vicinity of the man whose haggard aspect she could dimly perceive. His eyes gleamed wildly at her in the darkness; *the rain was falling* on him soaking into

his wet coat; a sense of something wild and awfu came over Ailie as she gazed at him from behind th shelter of her little casement. "You've been out al night on the hill," she said, with compassion in he voice, "you're wet and miserable and wearied; and it' night, when nae man can work. The Lord will le His message bide till the morn."

"It must be said to-night," he said, "do you think a man watches and wrestles with Him in the night and the storm for nought? I speak not of my will, and I will not ask you what is yours. Ailie, the Lord has revealed to me that you and I must go forth to gether to His work, bound together like Christ and His Church. You cannot go alone for you're young and weak. He has appointed me to you for a protector. He has said unto me, O man, fear not to take unto thee thy wife!"

Ailie retreated a step from the window with a little cry of alarm; but the next moment she returned and bent out towards him with almost a tone of tenderness in her voice. There had been a certain thrill of fear and wonder at first; but pity overcame every other feeling. "Oh, Mr. John," she said, softly, bending towards him, forgetting in her natural emotion the fictitious title of their prophetic brotherhood, and dropping back unawares into common use and wont: "what has happened this night has driven you wild. It's grief and sorrow—it's no the Lord."

"What has happened this night I know not," said Mr. John, in his exaltation, "what I know is the word and revelation of the Lord. This world has nothing to do with what has passed between Him and me on the hill. Satan has tried me sore and sifted me like

wheat. I have been in the desert like the prophet. I have heard the thunder and the storm and the earthquake; but He was not in the storm; and now there has come this small still voice. Ailie, this word is to me and to thee. Prepare! I would go forth, if that were possible, as soon as it is day."

Then there was a pause. The clouds parted, driven by the angry wind, and the sky lightened faintly with a pale gleam which showed the man's worn face and wild aspect as he stood before the window. No human sentiment was in his voice. It was not love that prompted this extraordinary intimation. His eyes were turned away from her, wandering into the darkness. And nature was not dead in Ailie's breast: she struggled against the sudden claim thus made upon her. Wonder, and horror, and natural repulsion, rose in her mind. And yet who was she to stand against the Lord?

"Oh, no, no," she cried; "we must wait. There will be clearer light. If such a thing as this is to be, it will be established in the mouth of two or three witnesses. I wouldna trust to myself, my lane. Oh, no, no; we must wait for clearer light."

"Take heed that ye perish not from lack of faith," said Mr. John. "Take heed that you despise not the Lord's message. Is it a little thing that He should drive a man forth to the hill like Elijah to charge him with this; and that you should set His revelation at nought,—you whom He has gifted with His Spirit? The guilt of the gifted is more than the guilt of common folk. If the flesh is content or not, what matters? Ailie Macfarlane, hear the Word of the Lord! and see ye sin not against the Holy Ghost."

A shudder ran through Ailie's sensitive frame.

"No," she cried, "no, no, never that. I'm His handmaid to do His pleasure. But oh, there's nought can be done this night. The night's for rest and thought and prayer. It may be the Lord will show His will to me too. And there's my father and my mother," cried Ailie with a little gush of tears. She had contemplated leaving them in the solemnity of her prophetic fervour, a Virgin-missionary, without realisation of the griefs of nature. But this new suggestion threw her back upon her natural self. She faltered and withdrew further back into the gloom of her chamber. "The Lord has aye shown me His will Himself, sooner or later; and I canna in one moment turn my back upon my kith and kin."

"Let the dead bury their dead," said her extraordinary suitor, in a voice which seemed to ring round the house like a groan. And then he added with a tone of authority which struck chill to Ailie's heart: "Hitherto you have been a law to yourself, and no man has been set over you; but the wife must take the Lord's will through her husband who is her head."

Ailie fell down on her knees trembling, and held fast by the sill of the window.

"I'm no man's wife," she cried; "and I'm feared and bewildered, and see naething clear. Oh, for the Lord's sake, gang away from me for this night!"

Mr. John turned his eyes which had been fixed on the pale opening in the clouds to her face. "Yes," he said, "I'll go; the flesh can bear no more. Go on your knees to Him, and not to me. And He may make it clear to you if He thinks fit; but in light or in darkness I call on you to obey. Is His servant to stand still because there is no light?"

"I'll pray!" cried Ailie, with a gasp. And he withdrew from the window, stumbling over the little flower-borders in the cottage-garden, and gazing vaguely up into the white break in the sky. His haggard, pale face fascinated her in its abstraction. She rose, and closed her window with nervous hands, still gazing at him; when suddenly another window opened—that of the attic over the cottage door.

"Wha's there?" cried a voice. Instinctively Ailie shrank back, but yet kept her ear at the opening that she might hear. It was the voice of her mother, who had been roused by the conversation below.

"Wha are ye, disturbing honest folk in the middle of the night, and what do you want here?"

"It's me," said Mr. John, raising his head listlessly. "I was sent to her with a word from the Lord."

Old Janet Macfarlane uttered a hasty exclamation. "I'm meaning no reproach to you, Mr. John; but I wish your words would come in the day."

Mr. John made no answer. He stepped over the paling once more, and paused at the door, immediately under the old woman's window. Fatigue was beginning to tell upon him: his passion was dying out. He had no longer any strength to defend himself. Perhaps Janet's heart smote her as she saw his listless step; or perhaps the natural rural impulse of communicating information was her only motive. She paused a moment, searching in her mind something keen and sharp to say to him—but finding nothing, bent out from her window over the leafy, embowered porch.

"Mr. John," she said, with solemnity; "nae doubt you've heard the news?"

"*What news?*"

"Margaret at the Glebe is wi' her Saviour," said the old woman. "She died at ten o'clock. Good night."

The noise of the window closing rang over all the silent Loch and silent heavens, and went echoing, echoing away into the hollows of the hills. It struck the man in his despair like the thunder of dissolving earth and heaven.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE death of Margaret Diarmid had been, as people say, sudden at the last. Whether the agitation of that visit had been too much for her, or if Nature at the end, having lingered so long, had succumbed in a moment to some unseen touch, it was impossible to tell. She was dead—that was all that could be said. Things had gone on as usual all the evening through in the dim parlour, where Jean came in from time to time to see that all was safe, and Isabel moved softly about at the appointed hours with her cordials and her medicines. Margaret had been lying, as her stepmother had left her, with her large, humid, wistful eyes fixed, taking less notice of everything around than usual, looking out, as it were, into an unseen world of her own. An intense quietness had fallen upon the house. The children had been sent early to bed; and Jenny Spence, who had volunteered to assist in the watch, was comfortably installed in the big elbow-chair by the fire in the kitchen. "We're better without her," Jean had whispered to Isabel; "but it's a real pleasure to her, and she's a connexion; and she'll no disturb Mar

herself had taken up her position, wrapt
ast within the parlour door. It was usual
n earlier hour than this, to remove their
. But Margaret had been so still that
ated to disturb her. "By-and-bye," she
am softly, as she lay there with her white
and her open eyes. She was not asleep;
so smiling, breathing so calmly. Could
e had taken "a good turn?" Isabel,
foot of the sofa, her duties over for the
her watch, praying mechanically, dozing
stupified by grief and weariness. Jean
saw nothing of what was passing. But
e stillness became intolerable, and weighed
er first impulse was to steal out to the
ouse Jenny Spence, and console herself
holy talk over the fire; and then she be-
lf that it would be cruel to leave Isabel
here, which somehow seemed all at once
chilled and silent. Listening intently, it
r that she heard no breathing but her
et's hardest paroxysms would have sounded
onsoling in place of that awful stillness.
began to throb in her ears, and her eyes
; was some time before she could move.
last summoned her powers and roused
as all clear to her in a moment. The
e, the sudden chill, had been death; but
illness, which all the parish expected was
umphant and victorious conclusion, ended
silence, without sound of trumpet or de-
f exceeding joy.

be impossible to say that this was not a

great disappointment to Loch Diarmid. Those wh had been Margaret's most warm adherents, against th others who condemned her for want of faith, felt them selves deceived in their most just expectations. Eve Jean consented with a pang that it was really so, an that there were to be no last deathbed pæans, an cries of victory, and visions of angels, to vindicat Margaret's sanctity. "Slipped out o' life at last like knotless thread; no glorifying her Maker, as was to b looked for," the crowd said, not disguising their dis appointment. They would not believe that God ha given her her release sleeping, as He does to His be loved.

As for Isabel there was an interval, unfortunately for her a very short interval, in which she was con scious of nothing. Not that the simple, healthful girl trained in stern Scotch self-restraint, found refuge in any swoon or fit of bodily unconsciousness. But fatigue had so worn and bewildered her, and benumbed all her faculties, that she was incapable of any fresh sen sation. The kind women took her to her bed, and the young creature, all broken and worn, slept the heavy sleep of sorrow, that profound, joyless slumber which pain and suffering bring to young eyes. When she woke, it was not with any fresh pang: she had carried the sense of "what had happened" with her through out her sleep—but with still the same heavy, listless benumbed sensations. Sometimes, when she started involuntarily at the thought that it was time for Mar garet's wine, or her soup, or her medicine, her heart thus sharply pricked would rouse up, and her eyes gain relief in the measureless tears of youth. But she did not come to herself for days, scarcely until the

ess was over, and the procession had
the cottage doors, and her sister was
rom her, while she herself remained be-
ıer life sprang again out of excess of

ive an idea of her feelings at this terrible
ıt conveying to the reader, I fear, an
ession of poor Isabel. It was not grief
that sprang up thus wildly in her heart.
ved her impulses, she would have rushed
ıto any distraction she could find, done
ything, it did not matter what, to relieve
ıarest, the feverish sense of energy that
ır. Grief, unable any longer to blunt,
her faculties. And yet she had to stay
rkened room, to read her Bible, as was
r at the moment, with her heart so pluck-
l rending her, that the mere effort to be
y. Jean, weeping in the kitchen, with
ily Bible opeued out on the table, and
strange consciousness of the proprieties of
which belong to her class, was comforted
ı quiet; but Isabel was incapable of such
restraint. She walked about her room,
ır knees, sometimes breaking forth into
ok her frame, glad to feel exhausted by
eager to do anything that would keep
at a little distance from her. The en-
ıs of the momeut, which to Jean was the
f, was madness to Isabel. How was she
Henceforward alone in the world, having
nothing better to think of; no one to con-
ound by, to invoke on all occasions. And

at the same time life springing up already in her, al strong, and full, and fervid, after this temporary inter ruption. Her veins seemed to swell; her pulses an her heart were ever throbbing, throbbing, till the soun of them filled the silent house as with a buzz of life.

It has been often said, that the many plans int which the survivors plunge after a death show huma nature's callousness to the deepest impressions; but i reality there may be a very different meaning in it. Sometimes it becomes one of the most pathetic form of suffering. "Let us do something—anything to mak this void and ache endurable," cries the soul tha loathes itself for living, and feeling still capable of life. It is like the restless tossings of fever, the writhings o a wounded creature on the awful sword that pierces it. So Isabel writhed and tossed, stretching out her hand wildly in her abandonment. Out of that horror and suspense of her existence it had sprung up more power ful, more alive than ever. All her old thoughts came pouring back upon her, her half-developed hopes, the desires of her heart. Such a fulness and abundance of life possessed her, that the very air seemed to puls and beat around. And this on Margaret's funeral day; when she should have been lying down prostrate, o seated somewhere, silent and motionless with her Bible in the shadow of the darkened windows! The sense o this tumult within her, so unsuitable to all the require ments of her position, shocked and horrified the poo girl. It seemed to her, as it does to the superficial spectator, to be heartlessness and insensibility. She was not wise enough nor experienced enough to feel that it was but a sympton of the awful convulsion that had rent her nature. Could she have turned her face

to the wall and been still, and spent the silent hours in tranquil weeping, Isabel would have felt consoled by the consciousness that thus Margaret should be mourned. But there was in her heart nothing of that incapacity of all exertion, that prostration, and weakness, and need of repose, which are supposed to be the characteristics of grief. Hurry, and tumult, and labour, would have been more congenial to her than rest and quiet. The room seemed to stifle her, the silence to drive her wild. Her grief was no sentiment but a passion, boiling through all her veins. She felt like a hypocrite when she heard Jean describe her, in the terrible days which followed, as "no just able to see you yet." When the fact was she could have seen anybody, and done anything, and welcomed any exertion, in the keenness of her misery; but grief, like all other things, owes a certain respect and homage to the world.

It was about a week after the funeral when Jean came in, solemnly tapping at the parlour-door, where Isabel sat alone. She was arrayed in her new black gown, and with her freshest cap, and had a certain air of gravity and importance about her. She came in softly and stood by Isabel, half behind her as she sat at the table. "Isabel, my bonnie woman," she said, tuning her homely voice to its softest cadence, "it's time we were having a talk, you and me, about what we're to do."

"What should we do?" said Isabel; "but sit down and tell me what it is: it's weary, weary to sit alone."

"My lamb!" said Jean, furtively smoothing the girl's soft hair. It was seldom she ventured on such a proof of sympathy, for Isabel was proud. But she did

not sit down; she stood with some agitation, twisting the table-cover from the table, shifting from one foot to another. At last her burden came forth with a burst. "It's best I should ken; it's a' yours now, Isabel; and you were never that fond of me and the poor bairns. I'm your father's wife, and I'm no a lady born like you; but I'm one that would never thole to be where she wasna wanted. Whisht! whisht! I'm no misdoubting your kindness; for her sake I ken you would aye be kind; but if there was to be a change I would like best it should be now."

"Why should there be a change?" said Isabel, weeping. "Oh, is there not change enough to please you? Would you like me to stay my lane in this still, still house and die? But I could not die—I would go wild; and, maybe, you would not care."

"As if I didna care for everything belonging to ye!" cried Jean, once more timidly caressing her step-daughter's bent head. "If it was only *that*, I would be content to be your servant—as near your servant as would be becoming to the Captain's widow," she added, after a momentary pause. "But your heart's touched and tender the noo; and if, after, you should reflect on me for taking advantage of you, or anybody else should reflect——"

"Who is there that has any right?" cried hasty Isabel, drying her tears with a hot and trembling hand. "There's but me now in all the world, and no one that can bid me go or come, or do this or that. Ah, me!"

"My bonnie woman," said Jean, "there's mony in the world would be real proud to think a' was their

t they pleased with, and to be able to

vered only by a despairing gesture, and
ılously the work upon which she had
g to employ herself. She would have
in books could she have obtained them;
e but few on Loch Diarmid, and she had
to think "idleness" a sin, and decorum
inst her seeing any one, or even going
ır the most melancholy exercise. So she
ally taken to her sewing, the only work
her hands on, the worst work she could
he moment. Her brain had been growing
when Jean entered, by multiplicity of

rand thing to be free," said Jean, her
g a little; "free o' them you're bound to
ı but what God has made. When it's na-
rent—or when it's your free choice it's
you and me, Isabel, are free to meet and
I'm no saying but what it would be a
ak; but if ever there was to come a time
ıuld reflect——"
na speak," said Isabel; "if it's your will
go, and let me take my chance. If I was
my senses or die on the hill-side, what is
folk? There is none to care if I was mad
orrow. If you speak because you're wea-
nd my silly ways——"
abel, my lamb!" cried Jean, with tears,
I would be your servant if that was a'.
ın tell me your will plain if we're to go
's yours. If we live here, the bairns and

me, it's upon you; and that I canna do unless you say plain out—Bide; and let things be as they have ay been."

"Is there anything else I could say?" cried Isabel; "maybe you've forgotten already what was said to you and me—yon night? But I will never forget. Nothing is changed but one thing. Oh, no, I am saying wrong—the heavens and the earth are changed and all's different—all's different!—but not between you and me. And I'll mind about Jamie," she added, once more hotly and tremulously, drying her eyes. "He's to be brought up for a minister, if he has a desire to it. We'll speak to Mr. Lothian, or Mr. Galbraith, and I'll not forget."

Jean shook her head softly behind her stepdaughter's back.

"I'm no speaking of Jamie now," she said; "afore he's old enough you'll have a man, Isabel, that may have other meanings. But I'm aye thankful to you for the thought. And a young lass is real solitary by herself. I'll bide since you say sae, and weel content; but when the time comes that you're married, my woman, we'll speak of that no more."

"The time will never come," said Isabel, hastily. "I have had my share of life. I am not like a young lass now."

"My bonnie lamb!" said Jean, with a tender smile, letting her hand rest on the downcast head. It was that last touch of self-pity which broke down Isabel's reserve. At her age the sufferer is so tender, so pitiful of herself! She turned suddenly round, and throwing her arms round her stepmother wept and sobbed on her homely bosom. She had been trying to live to

herself, but could not succeed; and of all living creatures this woman, against whom her pride had so often revolted, was nearest to her now. She clung to her as to her last support, and Jean received her in her motherly arms. Her heart had warmed to the wayward Isabel, all through her faulty youth with a love less reverent, but more familiar than that she had given to Margaret. And now a common grief united them as they had never been united before. She held the girl close, repeating over and over those soft names of homely kindness.

"My lamb!" she said, "my bonnie Bell! my bonnie woman!" and bent down her head over her, not with the lavish caresses of a lighter nature, but with a strong sustaining pressure. Jean could no more have dropped a flood of kisses on the weeping creature supported on her bosom than she would have thrown her off and abandoned her in her grief. But she held her fast against her honest breast, standing by her in the natural paroxysm. When the sobs grew fainter, and exhaustion mercifully dulled the pain, it was she who smoothed her hair, and dried her wet cheeks, and gave her such comfort as she could bear.

"Come ben beside the bairns," Jean said, drying the tears from her own eyes, "and leave this room that is so full of a' that's passed. There's a cheery fire, and the wee things' faces are aye a comfort. That was *her* thought: and I'll make you your cup of tea, and we'll do our best to bear the burden for her sake."

There was a cheery fire, as Jean had said, and Isabel was cold with that chill of grief which penetrates into the very heart. The blaze and the warmth gave her a little *forlorn consolation*; and so after awhile did

the sound of voices other than her own, and the care and service that surrounded her. Little Mary came and leaned against her, standing silent by her side with a child's speechless sympathy. And Jean talked to her, asking no answer. It was the first break to the stillness of death which had gathered round the lonely girl. The sound of the waves on the beach, or the rustle of the trees, would have been almost as coherent and significant. Jean talked by instinct, for the sake of the sound, knowing that was all of which her charge was capable. The hum of external life thus once more returned to keep from her ears that awful constant buzz of her own confused being. It was the beginning of her new existence; the life that seemed so awful and cold and solitary when she looked at it in her little parlour alone.

Jean attended her to her room when it was time for rest, as she would have done had Isabel been her own child, and gave her one of those rare shy kisses, of which the homely Scotch matron was half ashamed in her intense reticence and self-control. "Try and sleep, my lamb," she said, "I'll come back and put out the candle." And then she returned to her kitchen, to shut her shutters, and put the "gathering coal" upon the fire, and make all snug for the night. When she had ended her silent labours, Jean took her moment of indulgence also, sitting down to think in the elbow-chair, by the side of the dark heaped-up smouldering fire.

"Na, na," she said to herself, "I maunna trust to that. If Margaret had set it apart out of her share—but I'm no reflecting upon Margaret. It was a' the *first* wife's siller, and it's Isabel's by right; and I

dinna doubt her bit warm hasty heart. But if she were to marry that English lad, me and mine would be little to her after; and if she was to marry anybody else—even the minister—he would be for thinking of his ain first, and maybe a family coming. It would be real natural. Na, na! I maunna trust to Isabel; and, maybe, after a' it's best for the laddie," she said to herself, with a sigh. "If the root o' the matter's in him, he'll fight his way to it; and if it's no, he'll never try; and when a' 's said and done, maybe that's the best."

But it was with a sigh she rose from that moment of reflection and stole back to remove the candle, and saw with affectionate pleasure that Isabel, worn out, had already dropped to sleep. "The poor bairn!" Jean said, in her tenderness, and clambered up to the attic beside her children, with that sense of being the protector and sole guardian of so much helplessness, which fills the heart of a solitary woman with such softness and such strength. She was but a homely soul, with little refinement about her. In all the world there was scarcely one observer who, Isabel being by, in the interest of her youth, would have wasted one thought on her peasant step-mother; and yet Jean mounting the narrow stair leaving all in order below, spreading her motherly wings over the child who was not her own, as well as over the children of her heart —making up her mind without bitterness to the inevitable misfortunes of the future, was something nobler than pretty Isabel.

"I can aye work and keep them in bread," she said to herself, as she looked at her boy and her girl in *their sleep.*

CHAPTER XVII.

THE next step in Isabel's solitary new life was the visit of Miss Catherine, whose entrance Jean permitted a few days earlier than decorum properly allowed.

"After a', she's a connexion, and the poor bairn's best support," she said, as she went, wiping her hands on her apron, to open the door to the visitor. "Oh, ay, Miss Catherine! come your ways ben; she'll be glad of a kind word. She's no suffered that much in her health—God be thankit! But whiles my heart breaks to see her in that weary parlour her lane, and nothing to wile her from her ain thoughts."

"I had not the courage to come sooner," said Miss Catherine. "But, Jean, we must not leave her to her own thoughts."

"Whiles I wish she was but a common lass," said Jean, "that had to work, sair heart or glad. Work's aye a comfort—but sitting pingling wi' a seam! The minister sent some nonsense books; but I hadna the heart to take them to her. A chapter now and then, or maybe a page o' a good book—that's a' a feeling person can be expected to be fit for. I wonder at the minister. Was I to take in fuil stories and novells and siclike to my poor lamb?"

"They might have wiled her from her thoughts, as you say," said Miss Catherine. "And now I'll go in. Wae's me! I've looked on two Margaret Diarmids dead in this house, and me older than the eldest of them, and living to this day."

"It's for the comfort of the poor folk," said Jean, putting her apron to her eyes. And then she opened

oor. "Isabel, my bonnie woman, here's
ne come to see you," said she, with a

uld be but one way of meeting for the
stood up for an instant with a nervous
mposure, and then dropped weeping into
l's extended arms: and there was first the
tempt at consolation, tender words and
ats. "It's well with her—it's better for
ist not mourn, for her sake."
w tell me, my dear," said Miss Catherine,
abel had wept herself into quietness, "how
l with Jean? You are young, and it will
life for you here by yourself. Is it settled
ag is to go on as it has been?"
ould there be any change?" said Isabel.
use as long as it is mine. Is she not the
ve left?—and, oh, she's kind! though I
een good to her all my life."
not a drop's blood to you," said Miss
ith some warmth. "Isabel, I'm not one
un away from grief; it's a vain thing to
e young, and you have a sufficiency, and
ou be burdened with the second family?
g to say against it in the past. Jean was
or woman. But I cannot bear to think of
ere in this room after all that's come and

erine cast her eyes round the little sombre
e sun was in the west, behind the house,
ightness came in to enliven it. Even the
pon the wistful pale stillness of the Loch,
g rather than gladsome, and she shivered

a little as she laid her hand on the arm of the sofa on which Margaret had died.

"I like it the better," cried Isabel, quickly. "Where should I stay but here? where she can aye come back in her mind, and think upon me, even sitting up yonder among them all! If I were to go to a strange place she might not know——"

"Oh, Isabel, you were always fanciful. A blessed spirit, if it's permitted, can go anywhere, you may be sure, and know the place wherever you are," cried Miss Catherine, scarce less fanciful in the sobriety of her thoughts.

"Ah! but it would not be like home," cried the girl. "She has but to think and she'll see me—even when she has her gold harp in her hand and singing yonder. Just a thought and she'll know the very room I am sitting in, the light in the window, the bonnie Loch she was aye so fond of. She could not come to me so quick if I was in another place."

"My dear, we must not make idols of those that are gone," said Miss Catherine with tears in her eyes, "or like the Papists, worshipping their saints. We must mind there is but One that hears when we cry, and He can never fail."

Isabel made no answer. She took up her work with trembling fingers, and made an effort to go on with it, while the visitor, for her part, had enough to do to master the sob in her voice.

"You are so young," she said; "you cannot know what you want, or what is best for you. I know a poor gentlewoman in Edinburgh, Isabel, that would be very kind to you. A change would be good, though you cannot think it now. Making and mending is

or the mother of a family, but for a young
e, it is not to be thought of as an occupa-
ere are things you might learn that would
our life to come. How can you tell what
l be? Your blood, my dear, is as good
er's side as mine; and if you saw a little
—You're a proud thing, Isabel, you'll not
nt anything; but the change would do you
e novelty would divert your mind——"
was asking to be diverted!" said Isabel.
atherine, if it's like that you think of me!
g no change. My life, the best of it, is
have I to think about but how to be quiet
luty, and consider my latter end?"
irn! that you should be such a bairn!" said
ine; "if it were not for what you've gone
could find it in my heart to be angry.
rs after this you'll not be so sure that your
nor think so much about your latter end.
ely is that you have a long life before you;
-bye you'll marry, as most women do. I
ow—you're thinking of nothing of the kind
hen due time has past, and you have shown
you ought.—You may think me heartless to
ut I'm not heartless, Isabel."
not understand what you are saying," said
)h, let me be! I am at home, and among
k. I neither want change nor diversion—
married—nor a new life! If there is one
uld like, it would be to work late and early
are of the house. But I am too old to learn
w, and I am not old enough to be aways
out myself."

Miss Catherine gave a sigh of vexation. She had made up a little pet scheme of her own, and could now but reproach herself for having broached it too soon. She had decided within herself that Isabel must go to Edinburgh to be polished and trained, and that thereafter being well born by the mother's side, and a Captain's daughter,—("There would be no need to enter into particulars—Duncan being dead, thanks be to Providence," she had added to herself)—and pretty and young, she might yet make a good marriage, and emerge altogether from the lowly sphere in which her mother's foolish choice had cast her lot. Perhaps Miss Catherine had partially reckoned upon Isabel's high spirit being subdued by grief; that she would be ready to obey any suggestion, to take refuge in obedience, to be led whithersoever it was thought best to lead her, was what her adviser expected. But sorrow had not taken this form in the impetuous spirit of the girl. She resumed her work with a little air of nervous determination. She had obeyed her sister all her life, but no one else; and in this mingled excitement of passionate grief and newborn independence was little disposed to take upon her any new yoke.

"Perhaps it's best for the present," said Miss Catherine, finally giving in, "though I always think when there are changes to be made it is well to make them at once. You think you can go on for ever like this, and you'll find you are far wrong; but, for the present, my dear, let us talk of other things. Jean will be good to you, I don't doubt. If I were not concerned for your mother's daughter, Isabel, and anxious to see you free from all those common folk, I would not speak——"

very kind to me, and she's the nearest
now," said Isabel; "and if she was good
y father to marry——"
erine shook her head.
aye your old self," she said, "trying to
or all the sorrow in your heart. But we'll
on that subject. I would tell you the news
yside, if I thought you would care; but if
ot care——"
lo!" cried Isabel, with a violent, sudden
was ashamed of herself for caring, and
nk that the country-side should be any-
in her desolation. "I was meaning,"
d, timidly, "if there's any news about

Ardnamore has gone mad, I think," said
ie. "My dear, don't cry—but I'm grieved
r that man. They tell me he's to marry
hat they are going away, two fools, on
mission. Isabel, is it for him you are
h tears?"
here, the last day," sobbed Isabel, chok-
recollections. "He fell down there on his
my Margaret! and she put her bonnie
head. I thought nobody would ever be
o name his name."
ling, I did not know," said Miss Catherine,
If I had known this I would not have
I thought *that* was all over and past, years
did not think you would remember—you
ng."
aye remember what happened that day,"
through her tears, "and married, did you

say? Oh, Miss Catherine, are men like that? Not fortnight since he was there, crouched down on t very floor!"

"There are plenty of men like that," said M Catherine; "but in poor John, it's despair that is dr ing him. I see all now. He lost heart and hope wh he took farewell of her; and he's mad with his p phesying and his mission. He is my cousin, nea than you, Isabel. I knew him when he was but t height, such a bonnie boy. I cannot but be sorry the man."

"And Ailie!" said Isabel, under her breath. E first impulse was one of indignant passion; and th there came over her mind a thought snatched from l own youthful experience, such as it was. To marry man and find after that he loved some one else, ev were she dead and gone! "Poor Ailie!" she said unc her breath, after a pause. The indignation was account of her sister; the pity was her own.

"Ay, poor Ailie!" said Miss Catherine. "It's great rise to her in life if it ever comes to pass; b she will have to part with all her friends, and I dou much what she'll get in return. Mr. Lothian has be ill, Isabel; that is why he has not been here."

"Has he not been here—I did not know," sa Isabel, with profound and calm indifference. M Catherine gazed at her for a whole minute, witho moving, her eyes fixed with a wonder beyond wo on the inexperienced creature who could thus balk t most artful attempts to draw her into any path she c not choose herself.

"My dear," she said, rising, "you do not know the love that good man wastes on you. Would y

have been as careless as that if I had spoken of the lad under his roof? As if the minister was not worth twenty of him! and you not to see it, you foolish, foolish Isabel!"

"Miss Catherine," said Isabel, rising too, with fine youthful gravity and superiority, "is it right to speak like that to me, at such a time?"

These last words took away Miss Catherine's breath. She was lost in amaze at the curious innocent dignity and cunning and utter unconsciousness of Isabel's self-dependence. She felt herself rebuked by the girl who stood so pale before her, who was so resolute and superior and certain of what she said. Had the circumstances been different, she would have laughed at the native skill with which her attempts were baffled. But it was not a moment to laugh, as Isabel had said.

"Well, well; you will not hear anything I have to say," she said, "but there may come a time when you will be glad of my counsel. And when that time comes it shall not be denied you. Come to the House and see me when you're able, Isabel, for the sake of the past. You need not be afraid. I'll keep silent and give you no advice."

"I will always be thankful for your advice," cried the unconscious girl, "more thankful than I can tell—for who have I to look to now? I would thank you, on my knees, if ye would always tell me what I ought to do."

Miss Catherine could not restrain a smile; but Isabel's earnestness and good faith shone out of her serious eyes.

"If you bid me counsel you in the general, and then turn *away from every* single thing I say, how

can I help you," she said? "But, my dear, I stay now—go out and take some exercise, and sit brooding here. Jean will take care of you, a fresh air will do you good."

"I was thinking to take a turn—on the b where it's quiet," faltered Isabel. Perhaps sh afraid to meet Miss Catherine's eye; she swerved a little so as not to face her, and paused, an sought refuge in tears, she could not have told w

"Eh, but these bairns are strange creatures," Catherine said to herself as she left the cottage. to think she would be too broken with her g mind what she did. But no! for all so young is, as fixed in her ways as if she knew the worl beginning to end like an A B C; going her ow and thinking her own thoughts, and how to ha own way. And not a fortnight yet since my Margaret was laid beneath the sod. These cre now-a-days never know what sorrow means. think of themselves when *we* would have broke hearts. And me that was always so fond of that Bell!"

Thus the old lady mused as she went dow hill from the Glebe, notwithstanding all her expe with not much more understanding of the young ture she left behind her than had she been twent Isabel. The girl wept bitterly by herself whe friend had gone. It was her first contact with th side world, and she felt that all the strings nature had been pulled awry, and that she had nothing but contradiction where she owed only r and tenderness. Tears of mortification and shame to her eyes, and every fresh touch opened the s

of her natural grief. And she had betrayed to Miss Catherine the guilty, vagrant thought which as yet she had hidden even from herself. Why had she said she was thinking to go out upon the braes? In reality she had not thought of it. And what could Miss Catherine believe but that she was always thinking of her lover, yearning after those meetings, which at all times Isabel had been half ashamed of, as too like the rustic wooings of a "common lass?" Shame bowed her down to the ground; she had been wrong in every way, full of nothing but herself.

"Oh, my Margaret!" she said, with the bitterest sense she had yet felt of her loss. Margaret had stood between her and the outer world; she had been her conscience, guiding her with an infallible tender guidance, of which she had never herself been aware. When Margaret was pleased what had Isabel cared who should blame? And Margaret had been so easy to please! It was different, very different, explaining her wayward ways to that soft judge, with now a tear and now a smile—and thus standing up to defend her independence and assert her own judgment against the world.

Isabel had but scarce dried her tears, and composed herself as best she could to her solitary labour once more, when Jean stole in with anxious looks.

"My lamb," she said, "there's the minister's coming up the hill. He's been ill, poor man—and white and wan he looks as I never saw him look before. Will I let him in? It's better now if you can bear to see him; and, Isabel, if you're feared for his speaking, I will cry upon the bairns and get out the Book, and he'll give us a *word o' prayer.* I dinna ken what he may

think, for he's newfangled in his ways. But that w
aye the practice on such an occasion, as long as
mind. Will I let him in?"

Isabel turned away with a hasty gesture of pai
but she was humbled and penitent, and the solita
parlour looked more solitary, more dreadful than ev
to her broken and suffering mind.

"I do not care who comes," she said, with petulanc
"Let them all come. When they have once been he
and spied upon us how we bear it, maybe they will l
us be, and come no more."

"Oh, Isabel!" said Jean, "it's no with that thoug
the minister comes. You know well what's in h
heart, though he might be your father—and a' t
parish kens."

For the first time this suggestion was a kind
comfort to the poor girl. She had been feeling
ashamed, so wicked, that there was some balm to h
in the thought that all the parish was aware with wh
feelings she was regarded by the first man in it, a
the esteemed of all.

"Let him come," she said, sitting down by t
window, where she would have the Loch at least
turn to, away from the reproachful affection in M
Lothian's eyes. "If they would but let me alone
she said to herself; but in her heart,—the impatie
petulant, struggling heart, desired anything rather th
to be left alone. She sat and waited for him with
curious thrill running through her. He was nothing
Isabel—all the love she had to give was given
another; but there came into her mind a sense
wonder whether now she stood alone the minis
would care for her at all? Had it not been the shad

Margaret he had loved in her? Could it be that her mple self,—her silly, childish, variable self, doing the ings she would not, and leaving those undone she ould, could be still dear to the man who stood on so trangely different a level? It was a curious experiment she was about to make, and her whole mind was moved by curiosity to know how it would be.

If any one imagines that all this busy crowd of thoughts, all the ceaseless throng of speculations and reflections that crossed her mind, were inconsistent with the great strain of grief which ran through all, it will be because the critic is happily ignorant of that strange self-consciousness in which sorrow lives and has its being, and which calls up a thousand lurking fancies from all the dark corners of the feverish mind —as let "In Memoriam" answer, better than any weaker voice.

Mr. Lothian came in, looking, as Jean had said, white and wan, yet full of a hushed fever of agitation, with flushes of colour crossing his cheek, as he came up to her, and took into his her half-reluctant hands. Then Nature suddenly, as with a stroke, quenched out all the curiosity that had been in Isabel's heart. The sight of him woke again the tears in their fountains. She could say nothing to him, but only weep helplessly with her head bowed down, almost choked by the convulsive sob which climbed into her throat. His heart was so melted with love and pity that he laid his hand on her head with half-paternal tenderness.

"Poor child! poor child!" he said, bending over her, holding the soft small hand which she no longer thought of withdrawing from him. The sight of her tears *was almost more than* he could bear.

He was still standing by her when she can herself, and the first thing that roused Isabel wa instinctive homely politeness which her humble b ing had taught her. As soon as her eyes were so of tears that she could see, she would have ris find a seat for him.

"Sit still, Isabel," he said, "I have not con weary you to-day; I shall not stay. Only one mor my dear, to tell you—but what can I tell you? know everything I would say."

Isabel could make no reply; but somehow on very borders of that outbreak of her sorrow there to her the sense that her curiosity was satisfied. man's voice, though he was so old, like her father, eloquent and musical with love.

"I could not come to you sooner," he said, "a have not come now to trouble you with words. not the time to speak of what one might wish, or one might dream. But, my dear, I want you n forget that there is one heart not far off full of for you. Not a word—not a word. Isabel, I asking nothing, my dear. I am going away minute, as soon as I've said what I have to say. K ness you'll have in plenty—but love is rare. I tho I would just come and tell you of mine."

"Oh, Mr. Lothian, I do not deserve it!" sob poor Isabel.

"And that there is not a trouble you have, a tear you shed, but I would fain bear it for y said the minister; "and my thoughts never leave in your sorrow night or day; that is all. My d when you think, you'll understand. It is not to h

se anything back—it is but to be a com-

deserve it," Isabel repeated, not knowing

the good man sighed, and laid his hand enderly, reverently, upon her drooping

be your father," he said; "but I love you. for this time, my dear. That was all I

moment it was as a dream to Isabel that there. She cast a timid look round her, gone, and the very sound of his footsteps died away from the flags at the door. amazed, with the great Bible in her arms step-daughter's eyes. "Ye'll no tell me said Jean; "and made his first visit to a nily without a word of prayer? What did hat could he be thinking of? Lord pre- as it but some appearance, and no the self?"

no time to stay," said Isabel, faltering; ne to say a word. That he minded upon as sorry——He had no time to stay!"

ith her big Bible in her arms, and her full of consternation and disappointment, rstruck in the middle of the room.

upon us!" she said. "How was it like he ? Folk well kent and thought of in the re ever he was heard of. Weel, weel! a day passes in this world but folk may hing; but I never yet heard of any minister

that would gang to see a bereaved family, and leave without a word of prayer!"

It was the subject of her eloquence all the evening after. She had "cried upon" the bairns, and she had brought the book from the drawer in her own room, in which, being too precious for daily use, she treasured it. And then had found the minister gone! The good woman could scarcely have been more shocked had he committed some offence against morality.

"I wouldna have believed it was possible if all the parish had threeped it in my face," she said to Jenny Spence. "A bereaved house, and no a common bereavement. You would have said he would have made use o' the occasion to gie us a' an exhortation; and him to go without even a shake of my hand, or a word of prayer!"

"And yet he's a real kind man," said Jenny; "though folk say he's an Erastian in his heart."

CHAPTER XVIII.

It was some days after this before Isabel actually ventured out upon the braes. She had strayed about the garden, looking wistfully along the road, not without a thought that the circumstances were such as to justify Stapylton in coming to her, even within the shadow of her own house. He had asked for her, she knew, at the door, as had everybody in the parish; and it seemed natural to Isabel that her lover should know by instinct the moment when she first looked into the *open* air, where all their meetings had been. But *either* he was not aware, no inward monitor having

warned him, or else his reverence for her grief was too great to permit of his approach at such a moment. Isabel in her own heart wondered wistfully at his delay. "If it had been me, I would have aye been upon the watch, to comfort him," she said to herself; "but men are different." And then she thought of Mr. Lothian and the half-dozen words he had said to her. Ah, but he was an old man; he had not the occupations, the distractions of youth; and he was all but hopeless, eager to seize every opportunity of thrusting his attachment before her. Whereas Horace knew she knew; and knew also that she loved him as well —or might it be better than he loved her? It would be hard to tell how the poor girl longed for him in her solitary sorrow. Only to have him stand by her, say her name, would have been consolation beyond all that the most eloquent voice on earth could give. She thought of clasping her hands on his arm, and bending down her head, and crying her heart out there, as a child thinks of rushing to its mother's arms. Isabel had no mother, no friend now that Margaret was gone, so dear as to take that place; and, accordingly, yearned with a sick heart for the young man whom she had made a god of, and who had about as much real sympathy for her grief as his dog had. She was even aware—so humble is love—that he could not enter into it, as many less dear to her could; and for that very reason longed for him all the more, to move him by her grief, to win him over to fellow-feeling by the mere sight of her tears. This longing, however, did not seem to call forth any response from Stapylton's heart. Her thoughts played about him continually without *moving him. None of that* curious, subtle communica-

tion between mind and mind, which makes one aware instinctively of the needs of another, influenced Isabel's lover. She stood in her garden in the autumn twilight, gazing out upon the pale loch and the shadowy ways. But he never came, never even appeared at a distance to look at the place which contained her, as the poor girl thought he must have done. Could he be gone? This thought racked her mind, gradually distracting it from the immediate empire of her grief. It would have been right for her to appear at church on the Sunday following the funeral, and both Jean Campbell and Miss Catherine were deeply scandalized by Isabel's refusal to go. But she took one or two solemn walks in the afternoon, leaning on Jean's arm, as her step-mother thought proper, though Isabel felt herself possessed of energy enough to climb mountains or walk leagues. And still the one figure she looked for everywhere, eagerly, furtively, from behind her crape veil, was not to be seen.

One afternoon, standing in the garden, seeing nobody near, a forlorn impulse seized her to visit the birch-tree on the braes, which had been so often their trysting-place. Looking up and looking down, the white roads seem to her to extend for miles on every side, without a single passenger upon them. Nobody, then, could criticise or blame her for that sick movement of her heart. Isabel went in softly, feeling her circumstances now too solemn to permit her to run out with a shawl round her as she had once done—and put on her bonnet. And then, with a thrill of excitement, took her way up the hill. Either its steepness or some strange expectation took away her breath. The braes were changed from what they had so lately

ferns were crumpled up by the first touch
l tinged with yellow. The heather bells
and dead, with the colour and life gone
ı, like so many *immortelles*. The long
s birch had grown brown; the wind blew
the heathery slopes, and there were some
ow among the hollows of the hills; under
. the scene was still wildly sweet, but the
ıe down behind the hills on the other side
l, and the grey tones of the evening stole
led heather, and sobered down the range
s behind out of all their dramatic variable-
the turf was wet under Isabel's feet. The
ır bushes caught her dress, and sprinkled
owers of rain-drops. She was cold, and
mk within her. Was it maidenly to come
r him here when he did not seek her? Was
: her bereavement to be able now to think
emember anything about the birch, and all
words that had been said under it? She
ı softly, almost with a sense of guilt, round
ıtem. There were only young trees on the
this little lady of the woods with its long
ıg, and its graceful, slender stem, was like
had said so, moved by the sentiment which
nakes the dullest mind poetic. She thought
she put her arm round it, and leaned her
nst the silvery bark. Moved by her touch,
ɜs dropped a little shower of rain over her.
tears? She wept, too, leaning upon her
ikeness.

liker me now—far liker me now—for I'm
ne!" said Isabel; and with a pang of ex-

quisite anguish could not tell which she was mourning for—her dead Margaret or her lost love.

But tears will not flow continually, however full the heart may be. They had all dried out of her eyes after a few minutes, and she stood still leaning against the tree, gazing out once more upon that familiar landscape, and wondering if she was to see nothing for ever and ever but the still loch and the roads that stretched away so long and wistful up to the sky on one side, and away to the Clyde on the other, without a living creature upon them to break the stillness—when she heard behind her a rustle as of some one coming. She dared not turn her head to see who it was, but the sound made her heart thrill and beat with a wild excitement she could not control.

Then, suddenly, an arm was put round her, and a voice sounded in her ear. She had known it must be so. A flood of satisfaction came into her heart. "I thought I was never to see him more!" she said to herself without turning her face to him. But he had come at last, and her mind for the moment required no more.

"It was a long time before I could make sure that this black figure in a bonnet was you," he said, as if they had parted an hour before; "I have been gazing and wondering for five minutes who it could be. I ought to have thought of the change of dress."

Was this all he had to say to her after "what had happened?" Isabel's heart shrank, with a sense of sudden chill, within her breast. Those secret tears which she had thought she could shed leaning on him, to relieve her heavy heart and hot eyes, dried up in their fountains. But she reconciled herself to it with

he anxious humility of love. No doubt he had other hings on his mind, business of his own, something hat had kept him from her. How could she acknowledge to herself that he was less than perfect when she eeded him so much?

"I came out because my heart was sore," she altered. "I cannot tell why; I thought I would like o see it again."

"Not to see me?" said Stapylton, coming round where he could see her face.

"If you had cared for that you might have come before," said Isabel, with a little movement of displeasure. How different it was from the conversation she had dreamed of!—the soft words, the tender pity, the assurances of his love.

"Yes, among all those women that are constantly about you," he said, "your stepmother, and that old witch Miss Catherine—to see you coddled and kissed and mumbled over! No, Isabel; if I could have had you all to myself, as I have now—"

"And you never thought. Maybe she wants me sitting there her lane? Oh, Horace! I would not have studied my own pleasure if you had been in trouble."

"Well, never mind," he said. "Of course I am not so good as you are; if I were to show myself so gentle, and patient, and unselfish, it would be taking your *rôle*. But we must not quarrel now we have met. You are pale, my darling. They have been shutting you up indoors and preaching you to death."

"Do you think there is nothing else to make me pale?" said Isabel, moved once more by a pang of disappointment.

"Don't let us speak of that. Why should we dwell on such gloomy subjects?" said Stapylton. "Change of thought is as necessary as change of scene; and, besides, I have other things to tell you of. It is weeks now since I have been able to get near you. Don't let us be unkind and miserable now that we have met at last."

Isabel had no answer to make. She was stupified by his tone; and yet how could she, loving him as she did, tell herself that he was heartless? Her startled soul paused and stood still for a moment, and then she said to herself that this must be the way folk thought in England, the custom of the bigger, greater world. No doubt it was only in an out-of-the-way corner like Loch Diarmid that there was time to dwell upon personal grief. She dried her eyes hastily with a furtive hand, and half upbraided herself with self-indulgence. But she could not reply.

"I am not very cheerful, either," he said. "I want you to comfort me, Isabel. I have heard from home since I saw you last, and I have no further excuse to make. I fear I shall have to go away."

"To go away!" cried Isabel, feeling as if the sky had suddenly darkened, and all comfort had gone out of the earth.

"It is very hard upon me," he said, "just when I might have had you a little more to myself. But I am not my own master, and the folks at home must be obeyed."

What could she answer? So much in need of pity, and comfort, and soothing, as she was, so unprepared to encounter any new blow! She gave a little gasp as for breath, leaning again upon the birch-tree

nors the chill tears from its long drooping
me down upon them like a shower. Stapyl-
aside with a little impatience.
" he said; "mind what you're about!"
after a pause, "Well, it appears you have
ay!"
can I say?" said poor Isabel, shivering
m and pain. "If you must go, Mr. Stapyl-
ot matter what I think or what I say."
it would be like that," he cried; "I knew
take it as an offence. But, Isabel, look
e been dangling after you for more than a
are quite willing I should hang about and
a here; and perhaps you would let me
to the cottage and see you, for anything I
ow. But as that is all the satisfaction I
ot, or am likely to get——"
satisfaction would you have?" said Isabel,
reath.
satisfaction would I have? that is a charm-
n to put to me after all that has passed
. Just look here, Isabel; if it had not
our ridiculous scruples, think what a dif-
on I should have been in. I'd have written
itent letter, saying I was very sorry, and
ad that I was married, and all about it.
d have been a flare-up, of course; but what
have done? Whereas now, what can a
I cannot moon on here for another six
another year, or perhaps more than that.
people, nor anybody's people, would listen
moment. When I speak plainly you are
d yet it is all your own fault."

Isabel stood leaning upon the birch, with her eyes cast down, and the chill evening closing over the scene, and listened with a desolation in her heart which no words could have described. What she had expected was so different: that her grief should be the first thing to be considered; that she should feel his arm supporting her, his help strengthening her, the burden taken half off her shrinking shoulders. She shrank back into herself, as she stood and listened, with that humiliating sense of too highly raised expectations and of looking for something more than she deserved, which is so bitter to the heart. She shrank, and a languor as of death came over her. She could not raise her head against those unmerited reproaches. There is nothing that so undermines one's self-confidence as to find out suddenly that what one took for the highest approbation and appreciation was in reality criticism and disapproval. "If I look like that to *him*, what must I look to other folk?" Isabel said to herself. Her pride was not roused, but broken down. She leant her throbbing head against the cold support of the tree, but softly, not to move the branches, and rouse his impatience again; and traced unconscious devices with her foot upon the damp, mossy turf. Even the thought of answering him was absent from her mind. She had to receive the expression of his will; but what could she reply to it? She had nothing to say.

"So," he continued, after a pause, "I am to be left to make the best of it, I suppose. You have no answer to give me even now."

"You have asked me no question, Mr. Stapylton," said Isabel, faintly. "You have but found fault with

'never my meaning to keep you hanging
say. What you asked me was impossible
if I am aye to be reproached and blamed
pens, maybe it is best that it should al-
ossible. I would not be the one to keep
om your own folk—or waste your time—

nore?" said her lover, irritated. "Say
re! say you've been making game of me
I can believe it. Perhaps that canting
Ardnamore would please you better.
as in the cottage not long ago; or the
"

heart swelled as if it would burst. She
ooping head with what remnants of pride
in the utter overthrow of all her strength.
t tell," she said, with a gasp, "what right
s to say such things to me." And she
erself from the birch-tree which had been
support—but softly still, poor child, not
n him the rain with which it was laden—
step or two away. Then she paused, find-
ork to stand alone, and harder work still
e convulsive sobbing which struggled in
If we are to part," she said, softly, taking
en the words, "you know best—I am not
d; but if we are to part, may not we part
st?"

a woeful smile she put out her hand to
as too weak for pride; she seemed to her-
ing, too, like Margaret, and dying folk
id, she said in her heart. He was but a
rhaps knew no better; and she was too

much crushed and wounded to be angry. The only anxious desire she had was to be done with this, and to get home to the fire, to feel some sensation of warmth in her once more; and then die.

"I think you want to drive me mad," he said; and then he seized the proffered hand with sudden haste, and drew her almost roughly to him. "This is a woman's way of doing things, I suppose," he said, "but not mine—crying; you seem to me to do nothing but cry. Look here, once for all, Isabel, you had a reason before, but you have none now. Will you come with me now?"

"Where?" she said, in a whisper, not having breath enough or heart enough either for resistance or utterance.

"Where? what does it matter where? It might be here for anything I care; but all this ridiculous set would object, and there would be time lost, and the news would be sent home. Come with me now—come to-morrow. What does it matter? You have no invalid to keep you back. What! offended again? How is a plain man to understand all your fancies? If you like to be gloomy and cry I can't help it, Isabel; but what is the good of dwelling on the past? You did all you could be expected to do, and more. Surely you may think of yourself now."

"It is you that does not understand," said Isabel, with a sudden movement of indignation, withdrawing from him. "What can I say that will make you understand?"

"I don't want to understand!" he cried. "Come, Isabel, don't keep me in pain. If you'll meet me here to-morrow I'll arrange everything to-night. We'll go

and get the steamer there, and reach
w or Edinburgh in the evening. Isabel!
n't go away! You can leave a note for
her. Surely, I am more to you than she
make me happy, and make everything
is best to write and tell them after it is
go and see everything together; and you
ut of your parish before. Isabel, it will
he roses to your cheeks again."
her hand, though she struggled away from
it forward gazing into her face. Isabel's
rew crimson with a violent blush; all at
force and strength seemed to pour back
rt with this wild temptation which shook
ry depths of her being. The stream had
that this sudden tide swelled all her veins
and brought noises to her ears, the sound
, confused hum and buzz of every pulse,
hing and her heart. Escape out of this
ere into the ideal light—out of this chill
mth of love—out of this stillness into
id music and sunshine, and all the stir of

In sudden contrast with the monotony
rything quickened and flushed and blazed
yes; the temptation was doubled and re-
all the aching solitude and restlessness of
shook, as she stood alone, from head to
ied to pluck her hand out of her lover's
staggered and held by him, almost swept
force of the rising life within her. But
qual suddenness a sense of the chill, the
pe, the falling night, the heavy evening
ack to her, quenching out the light and

stilling the sounds. She uttered a heavy sigh, she clasped her hands together as if relinquishing all outside aid. "And Margaret not three weeks in her grave!" That was all she could find to say.

"What has that to do with it?" said Stapylton, "you sacrificed yourself to her when she was living—and are you to make no use of your freedom now she is dead? *She* can't feel it *now:* what will it matter to her whether you are here or with me? You are free now; go where you like, it can't affect her any more."

He had taken her hand again, but she wrung it out of his almost with violence; a dull flush came over her of nervous passion. "You neither understand her nor me," she said, with a pang in her heart. "Oh, how dare you speak—how dare you speak?" and in her anger she stamped her foot upon the yielding turf.

"Now I'll tell you what, Isabel," he said, "I am not to be trifled with any more. It must be made an end of one way or another. The steamer leaves Kilcranion at three——"

"It shall be made an end of," cried Isabel, "when you can speak to me like that in my trouble—when you can speak of *her* like that—oh, say no more! It shows me you do not know what love means—nor what it means. I bade you farewell, and you would not take it—but now I say, Go, Mr. Stapylton, go! You have said enough—oh, too much, too much! I cannot bear it. Free! and nothing to her! O man, man, have ye a heart within ye? and can you think I would be glad of that?"

"I can't speak your cant," cried Stapylton. "Isabel, this is the last attempt I will ever make——"

He followed her as he spoke, for she had turned on him, making her way towards the highroad. For few minutes he went on with her, keeping close by her side, speaking rapidly.

"This is the last time I will speak. The steamer leaves Kilcranion at three; I will be here waiting for you at two o'clock. I will take every precaution, and make every arrangement. Think it over, Isabel, you never made such an important decision. If you do not come to me at two to-morrow we may never meet more in our lives."

She stopped and stood gazing at him as he came to this conclusion. For his part he had grown pale and breathless with excitement. He looked at her menacingly from beneath his lowering brows. "Never in our lives if not to-morrow!" he repeated, looking intently in her eyes as if to look her down.

But Isabel was roused, too; she met his eyes without flinching, though every particle of colour had left her face.

"You threaten me!" she said, with unconscious scorn. "If it was me, I would go to the end of the earth for one I loved—not frown at her, and break her heart to do a thing that's impossible. Oh, how could you ask me to do it? It will have to be never—never! if that is your last word——"

And even then poor Isabel's maidenly soul was so faithful, so incapable of believing he could mean the cruel things he said, that her eyes grew wistful and woeful looking at him, for one final moment appealing still.

"I will wait for you all the same," he said, with a half laugh. "When you think it all over, you'll *change your mind. At two* o'clock I will be here."

For yet one more moment they stood confr
each other; he with a smile of affected calmnes
with a gaze that gradually clouded into despair.
she turned with a little wave of her hand, ar
him. He did not attempt to follow. He stood
same spot watching her as she wound her way tl
the heather. Once or twice he moved a step
same direction, as if to go after her, but imme
stopped himself.

"If I give in now all's lost," he said to h
trying to force his lips into a cheerless whistl
the calmness was a fiction. A shade of doubt
to creep over his face, as he watched her figure
pearing across the moor. "She'll have thought
of it before to-morrow," he said unconsciously
But Isabel was out of sight before he left the
birch-tree; then he went away slowly in the o
direction with moody looks and an uncertain step.
not ended as he supposed. He had taken it for g
that he must be successful. What had she to
her now? After all, a sister is only a sister, a
secondary relationship in life. What girl (he th
would lose a husband for the sake of a dead
who could interfere with her comfort no more? '
think better of it," he repeated to himself
heart.

CHAPTER XIX.

Isabel went softly down the hill in a concei
calm, such as only excitement knows. All th
tions in the world seemed to have swept over he
since she ascended the perilous path. To hav

her mournful figure, nobody on the Loch would have passed by without some voluntary or involuntary expression of sympathy. She looked as if she had come from weeping over the newly-made grave, rather than from the tumult of a lovers' meeting. Her head ached, her heart throbbed, pulses of pain beat in her temples. Perhaps she was going to be ill, which would have been a kind of comfort; but yet there was little akin to illness in the vehement gathering of all her forces to meet this extraordinary crisis of nature. She did not even know what the nature of her feelings was, what she was thinking, what she was to do, as she made her way home. There was a vague, indescribable force in her; a flush of hysterical strength, an exaltation of feeling and bearing and step. Jamie had been sent out by his mother to look for her, and met her some hundred yards from the cottage, stopped short, amazed by her looks, "Oh! Isabel, what is it?" he cried; but Isabel swept past him unaware of his presence. She went in through the parlour to the innermost retirement of her own room, and there sat down to think; but she was not capable of thought. Whether it was her mind all confused and stirred, or her body wrought to a pitch of feverish excitement, or her heart stung with fear, and fluttering with suspense, she could not tell; all together made such a sound in her ears, such a swelling in her veins, that the calm of thought was beyond her reach. She sat down with her bonnet and shawl still on by the side of the bed on which her sister had lain in the last silence of death, and leaned her head against the chill pillow to still and calm herself. It was the room which they had *shared before Margaret's* illness came to the worst.

It was the room in which she had watched, hal awake, half asleep, starting at her sister's lightest move ment, during those last melancholy weeks. Now i was still enough, cold, nothing but white coverlets snowy linen; a veil of muslin like a shroud over th little mirror, which had been placed there according t Scotch usage when Margaret lay dead. It was still Margaret's room. The touch of the white, spotles pillow on which Isabel laid her aching head struck a chill to her heart. It was the very touch of death t the living, suffering creature. Was this all she had t look for now? Was Margaret indifferent now, as h had said, to what she did or where she went? could i make no difference to her? And Isabel had not suf ficient command of herself to recollect what her siste had said to her, or to strengthen herself in her own visionary belief of the privileges of "those that are gone," as she stood between the warm, eager, impious touch of passion, and this still immovable snowy cold ness of death.

It was thus that Jean found her half-an-hour later when, having heard Jamie's report of Isabel's return she went to seek her wayward charge. Jean's firs glance informed her that the crape on her step-daugh ter's dress was limp, and spoiled with the damp, and that her feet were wet.

"Oh! Isabel, my bonnie woman, it's no good fo you. You've been in the kirkyard again," cried Jean putting her apron to her eyes. She could make no thing of the cry, "Oh! no, no, not there," that came from Isabel's white lips. Where could she have been but at the grave? It was perhaps a little hard tha she should deny it, as if Jean could not enter into he

t no doubt it was natural. Jean took the
ure into her motherly arms.
ben to the fire, my lamb," she said, "your
p and a' ruined, and your feet are as wet
itself. I canna have ye ill to break my
darlin', put off your bonnet and come ben
I'll change your feet and make ye a cup
, Isabel! it's an awfu' loss and an awfu'
s maun mind, it's God's will and canna be

rned away from her with a cry of despair,
misunderstanding set down but to the
emence of grief rekindled to its fullest by
oly visit which she supposed her step-
have just paid. She was half frightened
paleness and by the sudden flushes of
ame over her face. When she got her at
own elbow-chair by the kitchen fire, and
her chafing the girl's little white feet in
ut kindly hands, "Isabel, my bonnie
must promise me no to go again," she said,
her with kindly ministrations. But Jean
ache in her heart, that Isabel's averted
esponsive look meant a falling back into
ntagonism with which except since Mar-
she had always regarded her stepmother.
o reply to all Jean's sympathetic words.
er face from her inspection, shutting her-
he best could in silence and self-com-
t it was not till her thankless charge had
or in every possible way that Jean with-
sigh to her own concerns. "I'll leave ye
said, "since that's a' ye seem to desire—

and light the fire in the parlour: but it would e your ain heart, Isabel, if ye would be mair open w me."

"Oh, let me be!" sobbed Isabel, "let me be;" a sighing, Jean left her in her own especial sanctua by the warm light of the kitchen fire. Poor Isa was still very young and inexperienced in suffering. T weight of such a crowd of emotions was too much f her—and after the chill and the damp, and all the d pressing influences of the evening outside, and the co death-chamber in which she had first taken refu within, the kindly warmth of the fire, the soft silen of the house, the soothing effect of Jean's presence a touch, arrested in her at once the passion and t force. Nature stood still a moment and sought r from its unwonted excitement. Unawares her ey closed, her hands which had been strained togeth with a painful pressure unclasped, her head fell soft back upon the blue and white covering of the hig backed chair. Jean was so moved by the sight wh she returned into the kitchen, coming and going her work, that she turned even little Mary, just comi home from school, out of the darkling place. "Can no see that Isabel's sleeping?" she said sharply to h own flesh and blood.

"But, oh, what makes her sleep in the day?" sa Mary, following into the parlour with a frightened fa "Is she to die too like Margaret?" and big tears spra to the child's eyes.

"The Lord forbid!" said Jean, "but, whisht ne and be as quiet as a mouse—she's worn, and weari and grieved at her heart. When ane's in sair troul sleep is sweet."

"I wonder if she aye dreams of Margaret like me," said little Mary. "Eh, mother, Margaret comes and stands by my bed every night!"

"Oh, bairn, whisht, and no break my heart!" cried Jean, uneasily. "Ye were aye the one for dreams."

"But I'm no feared," said little Mary, "whiles she speaks, but I never can mind what she says. It's just the same to me as if she was living. Then I used to see her a' day, and now I see her a' night—and she has aye light round like an angel out of heaven."

"Oh, whisht, with your dreams!" cried the mother with a tone of anger, which belied the sudden tremor in her heart. "Have ye nae lessons to learn like Jamie? He's away on the braes, the poor callant! with his book."

"He's making a whistle out of a rowan-tree branch," said Mary; "I cried upon him as I passed, but he wouldna come in, and he'll cut his fingers, for it's getting dark."

"Eh me, he's an awfu' laddie!" said poor Jean, rushing to the door. What with her precocious daughter, and her backward son, and Isabel whose heart it was so hard to keep, she had, as she herself expressed it, "a bonnie handful." But fortunately the one anxiety kept the other in check, and uneasiness about the cutting of Jamie's fingers dulled in her mind the painful impression of Mary's dreams; and then night fell, and the children came in, and Isabel awoke to a sense of warmth and comfort. She did not even propose to retire into her dignity in the parlour, but stayed in the bow-chair, and even smiled as she had scarcely done before. *She was glad to take* refuge among them—

glad to avoid the inevitable encounter with her o thoughts; and indeed her mind had taken refuge i kind of insensibility. She had felt so much that the moment she could feel no more.

Thus it was that Isabel did not return to events of the afternoon during the whole course of night. The emotions that had been so strong in seemed to have been somehow lulled to sleep. made an ineffectual attempt to recall them when went to her own room, but fatigue and sleep got better of her. A curious sense of escape came o her. She had expected to be rent asunder with dignation, and that madness which devours the mi when we are wroth with those we love. A hund terrible questions had seemed on the eve of sweepi down upon her like so many birds of prey to be solved and settled in a moment. And yet nothing the kind had happened: instead, a soft insensibil had crept over her mind. She was too weary for a thing; and slept, like a tired child, quieted and co posed and wrapped in physical warmth and con lation.

These were her feelings when she fell asleep. Isabel awoke, in the middle of the night, as thought, in the deep darkness and stillness, br awake in a second, without any twilight interval tween the deep blank of repose and the tremend struggle of existence. She woke up all at once was sensible of the darkness lying heavy on her e lids, and the ticking of the clock through the ho and eerie rustling of the night; and of the con which had been waiting for her, lingering till all faculties were refreshed and her mind capable of

thoughts rushed at once into the heat of
; seemed to her as if somebody unseen had
ɜr and called her suddenly to it—to con-
ıestion which invisible hands seemed to
her eyes. Whether she should believe in
he man whom she loved, and for his sake
ster's memory and turn her back upon all
s and prejudices of her life—whether she
that he had insulted her sister's memory,
her own grief with indifference, and made
solemn moment through which she had
ɜr she could bear all this and forget it all
; or reject his love and leave him for ever;
ɜ question. Had it been put to Isabel, six
ıre, as a hypothetical case, she would not
ted for a single instant—she would have
the unworthy love with all the eloquence
ɔuth is capable; but things were changed.
his man past her own power of alteration;
ıooled herself with the subtilty of affection
for many a thing which was below her
ferent from it. No later than yesterday she
up her mind even, that his want of sym-
herself might be no fault on his part, but
eager craving on hers. Her heart was
y him, sore from the blows he had given to
ıd her pride and her more delicate nature.
ow it seemed natural she should bear all
ıe loved her. She had winced at the strokes
ıme, but yet adapted herself to them. He
ıh, and perhaps in England that was how
. He was a man, and men could not be ex-
be high fantastical, like women.

All these excuses she made to herself unconsciously, holding by him, covering with her love the multitude of his sins. And all that life could give was with him —the fresher air—the fuller sky—the movement and action for which almost with a sense of guilt her young blood throbbed. Here, nothing but stillness, monotony, solitude; there, companionship, action, a whole world to know and discover. In the profound darkness which it hurt her eyes to gaze into, in the intense chill of the early morning before dawn, she lay open-eyed in the stillness, and saw panoramas of her future life extended before her. On one side was the Loch, all quiet in the light of common day, with drizzling rain and cloudy skies and the grey atmosphere of winter, not a distinct feature it but the little mound and white headstone which marked Margaret's grave. And on the other, a beautiful new universe, altogether unknown, and all the more beautiful for that, an ever-widening scene. Edinburgh, England, the world—and Horace—not in stolen interviews and snatches, half of love, half of conflict—but with her always, learning to know her as she wished to be known, coming to understand all the discords and harmonies in her heart, her life-long companion, her warmest friend. It was not, she said to herself, as if she had a choice to make between him and any one she loved. It was between him and Margaret's grave.

No one saw the struggle, no one ever heard of it, save the unseen. It cost her many a tear and many a trembling, wandering, incoherent prayer. To make a choice on which the happiness of her whole existence might lie would have been a hard thing to do under any circumstances. But now it was more than hard.

ıe give him up? how could she retain him? the other seemed both impossible. Some- uld feel herself swept by the force of the) cast a furtive glance, as it were, at the picture on the other side—the vision of t upon the world together into the sunshine But as Isabel gazed it would seem to her e of the bride was always pale, always at remembrance was always tugging at nd that in the midst of all her happiness hing mournfully—Oh, to be back to that ve! The nearer prospect was still more he parish would rise up as one man asking, garet's sister that had done this thing? her be blotted out from among the names that to the general ear. And Margaret's white ould glimmer through the mists before her reproachful ghost. And if she rejected that altogether, the panorama of existence which her was dim and still as any life could be. her black gown always there in the one un- oom; Miss Catherine and the minister glid- the scene; but nothing more. And *he* gone nowledge, lost in the distant mists, gone— turn. She turned from side to side in her , sometimes hoping that out of the gloom it reveal itself a sudden figure, all blazing brightness, to show her what was needful —counting the steadfast, unbroken, terrible f the clock, feeling the darkness affect her, hich weighed down her eyes and oppressed When the first shade of grey trembled into it was to Isabel as a messenger from heaven.

Her heart bounded up with a sense of relief; and as the dawn grew, revealing in a mist the whitening hillside, and the reflexions in the loch, she found it possible to sleep again and forget her troubles. The struggle had exhausted her like a day's labour. She fell into a heavy slumber, which still lasted when Jean came softly into the room to rouse her.

"I dinna like thae long sleeps," Jean said to herself, with a sudden pang: "Eh, if she should gang too, like Margret!" and stood by the bedside reluctant to awake her, gazing at the sleeper's pale face, at the unconscious knitting of her brows, and tremulous movements of her hand. She grew more and more anxious as the morning advanced, and Isabel, trained in the habit of early rising, never woke. The good woman stole repeatedly to her stepdaughter's bedside, laying her hand softly on Isabel's forehead, and touching the white arm which lay on the coverlet to discover whether she was feverish. When she opened her eyes at last, Jean was gazing at her with an anxiety which she did her best to dissimulate as soon as she perceived that Isabel was awake.

"I thought you were never to wake mair," she said, with attempted playfulness. "Lazy thing! It's ten o'clock in the day, and half the work of the house done. But, now you're so late, bide a wee longer, and I'll bring you your tea."

"But I am quite well," said Isabel, raising herself with a little start.

"I canna think it, or you wouldna sleep like that," said Jean. "You, that were never lazy in the morning. You've gotten cauld on the braes."

Jean did not know what meaning there could be

in her words which brought that cloud on her step-daughter's face. She looked at her very anxiously, but could make nothing of it.

"I shouldna have said a word of where ye were," she exclaimed, with sudden compunction. "It's me that's a thoughtless body, never minding. But we must submit to God's will, my bonnie woman; and I'll go, and bring ye your tea."

"This will never do," Jean said to herself, as she left the room. "It will never do. She must have some change. I'll go and speak to Miss Catherine about it this very day." And when she went back, with the tea on a little tray, the suggestion framed itself into speech. "What would ye say to going to Edinburgh, and seeing a' the sights? But—eh! bless me, is the lassie daft?" cried Jean, thunderstruck by the effect of her words.

"I will not listen to you," said Isabel, with sudden passion. "Never! Go to Edinburgh! How dare ye put such things in my head? Go away, and play myself, and be happy,—and my Margaret not three weeks in her grave!"

"My bonnie lamb!" said Jean, with streaming eyes. "To see you happy—or if no happy, a wee cheerful—taking some good of your life—Margret would have given half hers. Do you think she's mair selfish, mair hard, no so thoughtful now?"

Isabel could but gasp at her with startled, wondering eyes? Was Jean, too, pleading for him? Was she taking his part consciously or unconsciously? She put away the food her stepmother had brought her, with nervous, *trembling hands.*

"I cannot lie here," she said. "I am quite well. Let me get up, and then I will know what to do."

"Lie still, my dear," said Jean, anxiously. "You've been waking through the night, and greetin' sore; and you've got cauld on the wet grass. Lie still this day, and rest."

"But I cannot rest," said Isabel. "I cannot breathe. My heart is like as if it were bound with an iron band. I want to rise, and to get the air."

"Nae air the day except the air from the window," said Jean. "I can be positive, too. Na, na; I have the charge of you, and decline's in the family. You shanna cross the door this day."

Isabel fell back on her pillow with the strangest sense of relief. She, who had never yielded to her stepmother in her life, felt a certain consolation in this exercise of authority.

"It is not as if it was my own doing," she thought in herself, and kept still, satisfied for the moment with her relief from all responsibility. The manner in which she subsided into sudden listlessness and quiet frightened Jean still more. Had it been any one else, she might have accepted it as the result of natural weakness or weariness, but nothing of the kind had ever been seen before in wilful Isabel. Nor did it last long. When Jean returned, an hour later, her charge was again struggling with excitement.

"I am going to get up," she said, with two brilliant spots of colour on her cheeks. "I feel as if I were in my grave here. I must get out to the fresh air!"

Jean's answer was to draw away the curtain from the window. Then Isabel saw, looking out on the

hillside, the falling of the noiseless rain. It was no white violent blast with actual colour and solidity, but the fine impalpable dropping which penetrates through every covering, and which the experienced West Highlander looks at with hopeless eyes. "To gang out into that wet would be as much as your life is worth," said Jean, solemnly. "The braes are nae better than a shaking moss, and the roads are running like burns. It's an awfu' saft day. Ye may get up and sit by the fire, but across the door ye'll no go, or else you'll quarrel with me."

This time it was with a kind of despair that Isabel listened. To be about to make a decision which should influence her whole life—and to be stopped by the rain! Even in her excited condition a sense of the strange incongruity struck her. It was almost as if a suicide had been stopped from ending his life by reflecting on the bitterness of the poison which was to do it. And yet, in her present state of feeling, the objection seemed a valid one. Could it be possible that he would go to the trysting-place with any expectation of meeting her there on such a day? She was stricken in body as well as in mind, though she was not conscious of it; and the sense of chill and wet,—the heavy uphill way, the sodden turf, the rain-swept steamboat, all the miseries of a journey under such circumstances, suddenly passed through her imagination. He would never think of it—he could not except her, or would he go himself on such a day. His departure could be put off, and with it the crisis, and time would be left to think. A little time to think, even an hour more she felt would be something gained. She had another *moment of tranquillity*, gazing out from where

she lay through the low window, upon the melancholy braes. Her room was on the ground-floor; indeed, there was but one room in the second story, which, with a corner partitioned off into a closet for the boy, was Jean's property. Isabel's lattice was not much above the level of that soaked and treacherous turf. She could see across half way to the Manse, and there was no one visible on the dismal slope. No, no! it was impossible! He would never look for her—never think of going himself on such a miserable day.

After a temporary lull, however, her fever returned. This time she rose and dressed herself hastily, putting on, in a half-dream, not her new "mourning," with the crape on it, but a thick winter dress, black enough to indicate any depths of sorrow. She did it, and felt she did it, in a dream, exercising broken gleams of reason on secondary matters while still her mind was totally uninfluenced by any reasonable purpose. She put on her black merino gown, which would be more suitable for the journey than the crape, and yet she had no more made up her mind to the journey than she had to take away her own life. And the one did not feel more unlikely than the other. When she had dressed herself with nervous haste, she went into Margaret's room, where she was in the habit of saying her prayers. But her prayers were so hasty, and incoherent, and wandering, that they did not calm her as might have been supposed. When she rose from her knees, her eye was caught by the large, old-fashioned watch placed on a little stand, which was now hers, as it had once been called Margaret's. It had been her mother's watch, a cumbrous, steady-going machine, with plain large cases of purply, almost

red gold. Margaret had been its nominal
right of her half-hour's seniority, but had
it. And now it was Isabel's alone, no one
any right to share with her the homely
She took it up with a hasty hand and put
breast, then paused trembling with a sense
seemed to her as though she were robbing
ster,—robbing the unconscious, unfearing
took it out again stealthily and looked at
or it was one of Jean's cherished duties to
keep in order the "gold watch," pride of
which kept time like any chronometer. It
on. With a shudder Isabel put it back
dress. This time she had forgotten all
watch, and recollected only that in two
short hours, her life must be won or

like a walker in a dream—that was the
ation she could have given of her own feel-
hed for her journey, yet without any inten-
ng the journey, she wandered drearily about
room. Except, however, the associations
itself, there were few relics about it to move
thing that belonged to or recalled Margaret
emoved at once by that officious care which
self in sweeping away every trace of death
ouse. Isabel roamed about the room in her
ndering, was there nothing left to tell that
ad ever been upon the earth; it felt damp
and was arranged with a cruel perfection of
white, shrouded, lifeless, and chill, the
f the dead, not of one who had once lived.
ive creature shivered with its icy loneliness.

Then she went into the parlour, the room where M garet had died. Though it was so cold it was only October, and "a fire in the parlour" was a lux which, except under very special circumstances, not to be had so early in the year.—The girl in solitude felt such a longing upon her for warmth the sound of life, that, after a few minutes, she ab doned her own dreary portion of the house, and sou the kitchen where her stepmother was. The chill the silence which should have been favourable to thi ing made her incapable of thought. Perhaps she s to herself under cover of Jean's chatter, and the voi of the children, should they be in the house, she co seclude herself to better purpose and make up her mi She sat down once more musing and bewildered in t high-backed elbow-chair. One o'clock, struck by t solemn eight-day clock, which gave a kind of mechani soul to the house, knelled upon Isabel's ear, as held her white trembling hands over the fire. It sho her like a convulsion of nature. But one hour more and all to be decided in that hour—and her mind nearer the solution, scarcely so near as last night.

"You're looking real weakly, my dear," said Jea "shaking like a leaf. I'm no sure you should ha risen out of your bed. Take this shawl round yo and I'll give you a few broth to warm you. You eaten nothing the whole day."

"I could not eat!" said Isabel, wrapping round h with a shiver the soft warm shawl. Tick, tick, tic Would nothing arrest these inexorable moments? they went on her thoughts seemed to rise round h like a whirlwind sweeping about and about her bew dered soul; every beat brought nearer to her the h

a her fate should still be in her own power.
was like one paralyzed, and could not
minutes pressed and trod upon each other's
st were so slow in their confused procession,
have been an age instead of an hour. At
Isabel sat striving to break the spell which
the door flew open and then closed vio-
Jamie rushing in wet and muddy from

raining now!" cried the boy as he dashed
the side of the fire. Isabel started as if a
uck her. Just then the clock gave its little
rning that it was about to strike the hour.
up to her feet with a sudden cry;—then
again—her pale head falling back against
er hands falling listless on its arms. Jean,
her, believed for the first moment that Isabel
She was as one dead, her eyes half closed
; her colour completely gone; her very lips
all colour. The struggle had been too much
he lay insensible in a dead faint before her
's affrighted eyes.

are rare upon Loch Diarmid, and Jean
was alone and entirely unprepared to deal
such phenomenon. She screamed to Jamie
the doctor, which, indeed, was a thing easy
do—but where to find a country practitioner
lock on a wet day, when he might be at the
of the parish, was, as Jean well knew, quite
atter. It was while she laboured with pain
to lift the inanimate figure which seemed to
Isabel's natural weight that she noticed her
er's change of dress, and after a while per-

ceived round her neck the well-known ribbon wl hung to the "gold watch." A curious sense of so thing suspicious and unexplained aroused Jean's m but she had no time to consider the question. Ja had gone for the doctor. Mary had not returned f the little school, more genteel than the parish scl and not so far off, which she attended; and there no neighbour near to be called to the rescue. Ja was at the door coming back again after a run of miles to the doctor's house, ere the patient began show any symptoms of recovery. And he brought w him Mr. Lothian, whom he had encountered on way, and who now entered breathless and pale w anxiety to hear what this new trouble was.

CHAPTER XX.

STAPYLTON sought the trysting-place on the hill the decisive day with all the excitement natural to crisis, but with little fear of the result. He had ta none of the precautions of which he had spoken Isabel. What need was there of precautions? would wear a veil of course, and a cloak. The r to Kilcranion was little frequented, especially on s a day; and by the time Kilcranion was reached, t would be, to some extent, among strangers, not li to recognition at every step as here. He made up himself a small bag of necessaries, put the money had just received to carry him home in his poc buttoned his great-coat, and took his way through drizzling rain to the hill-side. He said to himself, up to this moment he had been mistaken in his m

of dealing with Isabel. He had given in to her too much, showing no authority nor intention to be master. But now things were different. He was determined to show her that it was she, and not he, who ought to yield; and with that object in view he had regulated his conduct on the day before. Perhaps, had he been acting solely from the impulse of the moment, he might have shown her more sympathy, treated her less harshly at their first meeting after her grief; but he was acting on theory as well as inclination, and consequently was pitiless. She must know without delay, he thought, that it was a question between him and her own fancies, and that if she would secure the inestimable advantage of his companionship and protection, her own way must be given up. It must be given up; there was no middle way. She must consent to tear herself up from her family root. She must, by degrees, be reconciled to the sale of the cottage and the transference of everything belonging to her; or rather, when he had her in his own hands, there would be no further difficulties about that. And he was, so far as he was aware, quite honest in his intentions respecting Isabel. He meant nothing but to marry her—somehow—as soon as he had got her away from Loch Diarmid. His views were not very clear about the how and when. But what did that matter? In Scotland a man had but to say he was married and he was married. Nothing else was necessary. Isabel had never dreamed of being married in church or with any of the solemnities an English girl would have thought necessary; and a blacksmith or a Scotch minister, what did it matter? he said to himself with characteristic contempt. Thus he *made his way to the hill*, looking out for her with

interest and expectation, but scarcely with anything which could be called anxiety. He loved her as well as it was in him to love; and yet it did not concern him that Isabel must mount the hilly road, which ran as Jean Campbell said, like a burn, with the fast falling rain—or that she should have before her that miserable walk across the hill, and all the dreary, chilly journey, on such a day. He should have to put up with all these inconveniences himself, and why not she too? or rather when she was with him, could she so much as think of any lesser particulars? His vanity said no. He kept on the watch to see her coming and save her the task of wading through the wet heather to the trysting-place; but that was all the exertion it occurred to him to make by way of saving trouble or fatigue to Isabel.

Then he placed himself under the little birch-tree; it was a conspicuous spot on such a day; but no one was near to remark him. Of all the days in the year this was the best for such an evasion,—not a soul was to be seen about from one end of the parish to the other; the mournful landscape was all shut in with mists—the mountains were invisible—the loch, like a dull mirror, gave forth but a gloomy reflexion of the clouds. The moor looked treacherously green; the heather saluted every breath of air on the hill or chance movement of his own restless foot by showers of rain-drops; great, heavy drops, like tears, accompanied by brown withered leaflets, fell from the birch-boughs. "Thank heaven! this is my last of Scotland!" Stapylton said to himself, looking round with a shiver. The next time he was to look at this same scene, how different, how strange, it would seem to him; but at

that moment he was firmly resolved that he would never see it more.

He had loitered there for about half-an-hour watching for traces of Isabel's approach, and gradually beginning to be angry, when the rain suddenly stopped, and the sky cleared ever so little. That was so far good. He put down his bag, and lighted a cigar to comfort himself as he waited. Below where he stood, just within sight, the thatched roof of the Glebe Cottage rose like some natural growth out of the heather. No doubt she must have waited for this moment; though why she should have waited, keeping him in the rain, he could not imagine. However it was a pardonable sin if she came now. This thought went through his mind just at the moment when Isabel, rising to go to him, fell back and fainted in her chair. He paced up and down the wet turf, and smoked his cigar, and looked for her, calculating in his own mind how long the weather would "keep up," and whether there might be time to reach Kilcranion before it came on to rain again. Another half-hour, it might be, was spent in these speculations; and then he took out his watch suddenly, and woke to the consciousness that he had been waiting for an hour on the moor, that the steamer must be gone from Kilcranion, and that the way of escape unobserved was closed to them for that night.

It would be difficult to describe the rage which rose in a moment in his mind. She, whom he thought so entirely subject to him, whom he had felt to be delivered over to him bound hand and foot when she was deprived of her sister,—had Isabel rebelled against *his influence? Had she* cast him off? It did not seem

possible. A momentary thought of going off at once never appearing again on Loch Diarmid, punishing her by utter and total separation from himself, was his first thought. But even had there been inducement enough to do this, the steamer was gone, and that way out of the difficulty was lost at least. No, he would leave the spot to which no doubt she would yet come with her explanations and apologies; he would go away and prepare for his legitimate departure home and never seek nor see her more. He would——but was that Isabel? It seemed to him he could hear sounds from the cottage; the noise of doors opening and shutting—a babble of tongues. Could they be detaining her by force? But then no one in the world had any right to detain her—she was absolutely free. Still there was some agitation about the Glebe. He snatched up his bag, not without a private imprecation upon Isabel for making him thus ridiculous, that he should have to drag it about from one place to another; and then he turned rapidly down the hill. Some one came out of the cottage as he got full in sight of it,—some one whom he easily divined to be Mr. Lothian. "Confound him!" said the young fellow; what was he doing there just at the moment when Stapylton's fate was being decided? Could she have consulted him? Was it through the minister's plotting that his purpose had thus been brought to nothing? The young man hurried down, carrying in his hand, and cursing the troublesome bag, which but for her——it was a small matter, but it exasperated him more than a greater. He had half a mind to fling it at the cottage door and order Jamie to carry it for him for sixpence, by way of driving the stepmother out of her senses. But

something strange going on at the pence had just come out with another d in audible colloquy with her at the ell the doctor she's come to hersel," t lasted an hour, Jean thinks. But long when folk are feared, and maybe ur. She's come to hersel, and very 's nae such haste as we thought. But him he's to come on here as soon as

say what was the cause?" said the Stapylton listened eagerly.

likely to tell us," said the other; "the aked was, What o'clock was it? And gave an awfu' sigh, and syne lay as n—though what the clock had to do ns. I hope it's no her head; that would

aye been real healthy and strong. A e may faint, and yet no be that ill

e decline's in the family," said Jenny en they parted, the one returning to the er speeding on her mission. The bag ssive in Stapylton's hands. His clouded little. After all, she had not meant to the lurch. If she was ill that was a r. After a pause he went and knocked d asked how Miss Diarmid was?

meaning Isabel, she's no that weel," said "she was out yesterday in the damp, n a cauld." This was all the informa-

tion she would condescend upon to a stranger and a "young lad."

"But what did I hear you say about a faint?" said Stapylton eagerly.

"Lord!" said Jenny, who, like most of the villagers, disliked the Englishman, "how can I tell what ye might hear me say? I say plenty whiles that I canna mind myself; but Isabel's gotten the cauld. It's natural at this time of the year."

"Cold? and nothing more?" asked the young man.

"Ane can never tell—it might turn into an influenza," said Jenny; "but that's a' the noo, for a' that I can see."

And then she closed the door upon him, with a certain malicious satisfaction. Stapylton was no favourite in the parish; perhaps because of a sneer which was always lurking behind the few civilities which he had ever been known to offer. Jenny had no confidence either in his friendship or his love.

"Yon's the lad that would beguile a young lass, but be dour as iron and steel to his wife as soon as she had married him. I hope there's naething amiss between him and Isabel," she said to Jean, when she described this visit; and Jean felt a little thrill go through her, as if this new event threw light on something, though she could scarcely tell what.

"Do you think our Isabel would be thinking of any such nonsense at such a time!" she said, indignantly. But still a sensation as of some discovery darted through her own heart.

Stapylton however, shut out as he thus was from all approach to Isabel, was not to be so easily put off. He hastened down the road at his quickest pace, de-

mined to find out, at least, from the minister w
had happened. Mr. Lothian was standing at the c
f the doctor's house when the young man made u
im. And there, too, the messenger, whom he
m to leave the Glebe, and whom he passed on
d, was directing her steps. The minister was in
ieth year; but he was one of those fresh-colou
al men, who carry with them to the end of life
ndid brow and bright eyes of youth. At this mon
re was however a certain heaviness about him, wl
mehow Stapylton, unsympathetic as he was, for c
ined and understood. He himself was excited,
curiosity, and even interest,—yet satisfied to k
t it was illness, and not disdain of him, that
vented Isabel keeping her tryst. It was not enti
rtlessness either which made him so apparently
erent about her health, but only that rash yo
ness and utter inexperience which so often look
rdness. She might be ill, no doubt; but of co
e would get better, and all would be well ag
t Mr. Lothian's looks were heavy with care; and
ung man divined as clearly that he was weig
wn by anxiety, and that for every minute's suffe
dergone by Isabel Mr. Lothian had an hour's, s
had been written in the minister's face. He
nscious of a little wonder, almost of a softenin
ty, towards his rival. The sense that she was n
o the other than to him went through the young m
ind. But then it was natural it should be so
mself—well, yes, she was at the present moment
t of women; but he did not pretend to believe
e was the only woman in the world. And tho
e was a thing upon which he had very much set

heart, still there were other things also upon which his heart was set. Whereas to the minister she was everything,—the last hope and the greatest. For one moment an impulse came over the young man—a generous impulse, not of his own originating—something whispered in his ear by some good angel: to go away, and clear the path, and leave to the good man the one prize he asked from Heaven. About the space of half-a-second this idea fluttered through Stapylton's mind, and then was rejected with the disdain it deserved. A little laugh of vanity came from his lips unawares. "Much Isabel would thank me!" he said to himself. He could laugh, though she was ill—perhaps in danger. But Mr. Lothian turned round at the sound, as if even the laughter of another was an offence to him at such a moment as this.

"Is it you, Stapylton?" he said, with an evident struggle to be friendly. "You are merry, which is more than I am. It has been a dreadful day."

"Not cheerful," said the young man; "but only, after all, 'a wee saft,' as you say in these parts. You have not been consulting the doctor, I hope, for yourself?"

"No," said Mr. Lothian, fixing his eyes upon his interrogator, and adding nothing to the syllable. Stapylton's spirit of natural rivalry woke up at once.

"I saw a messenger for the doctor coming from the Glebe," he said. "I hope I might be mistaken—or if there is any one ill there, that it is only one of the children. Children are always ill."

"It is not one of the children," said Mr. Lothian. "It is—Isabel." He uttered the name with a sigh. He was so anxious, that he was glad to speak, even to Stapylton, of the subject that lay nearest his heart.

"What is the matter?" said the young man, himself feeling somewhat breathless.

"She fainted to-day," said the minister, "without any reason, so far as we know. She had been out yesterday, at her sister's grave, and I fear she caught cold; but a fainting fit shows a state of weakness which——I cannot but be alarmed at it," he added, hurriedly, with a faltering voice.

"So she said she had been at her sister's grave!" —Stapylton thought within himself. "Clever of Isabel!" "I thought women were always fainting," he said, aloud. "I never knew it was a bad sign."

"I suppose you don't know very much about it," said Mr. Lothian, with unusual vehemence; and then he checked himself. "Heaven knows it ill becomes me to be so impatient," he said. "You see, it depends so much upon the kind of women a man has known. Her mother died young, and then Margaret; they are a delicate family."

He could not say any more. Something seemed to rise in the good man's throat, and choked him. And even Stapylton was struck and startled.

"But, good heavens! she always looked like—the rest of us. I have never seen her look ill," cried Stapylton.

And then he paused, and cast his eyes back upon the time he had passed on Loch Diarmid. Certainly, she was pale in comparison with the blooming, laughing, joyous creature, like an apple-blossom, who had charmed him when he saw her first. No doubt, she was pale. But that was very comprehensible, considering her *sister's long illness* and recent death, and that

detestable mourning, which made everybody look like a ghost.

"It can't be anything," he said. "I saw her yesterday, and she was quite well."

"*You* saw her yesterday," said the minister, with a pang of jealousy. "Where?"

"Oh!—I suppose, on her way to—her sister's grave," said Stapylton, scarcely able to conceal the smile that curled the corners of his mouth. If she had been so completely in possession of her wits as to be able to give such an explanation of her ramble on the braes, he could not feel that her illness was a very serious matter, after all.

"I have seen her but once in her own house," said Mr. Lothian with a sigh: "but here is the doctor at last, and I must send him to the Glebe instantly. There are some letters lying for you at the Manse," he added, as he turned away. Stapylton, for his part, did not feel now so anxious about the doctor. He smiled to himself as he went on. It was clever of Isabel to give so ready a reason for her absence. Her sister's grave! He laughed softly to himself, with a full sense of the cleverness of the imposition and total insensibility to anything unlovely or derogatory to Isabel's perfection in it. She had got her feet wet and caught cold, and made all this pother. But, of course, she would be all right again to-morrow, and then——

Yes, it must be. He liked her all the better for having lied to keep their meeting secret. He had not thought she had so much spirit. And after all it would have been a wretched day for a journey. To-morrow would still leave time enough. He must send her a note somehow, to say so; and, well or ill, she must

pluck up her forces and do it at last. Thus Stapylton's anger evaporated into fondness, and his disappointment brightened into expectation. To-morrow! it was but one day more; and what, if instead of the pleasure of a pretty, charming companion, she had fallen ill on his hands on the very journey? Thus he gradually reconciled himself to all that had happened, his *amour propre* being consoled, and even elevated by the sense of his rival's melancholy and complete misunderstanding of the whole business.

"I could have relieved his mind," Stapylton said to himself with silent laughter, and was not sorry, for his own part, things having ended thus, to hurry to his room and put himself into dry clothes. Had he carried out his journey as he intended in these soaking garments, probably he should have been ill too. It amused him to think what might have been the consequence if Isabel and himself had both caught colds, and been reduced to gruel and hot water on the very outset of their elopement. But to-morrow—to-morrow, no doubt the sun would shine, and all would be well. He looked at the glass as he went to his room, and found that it was rising; and already it had ceased to rain. Dry clothes and a fine day would make all the difference. And Isabel, who could no longer assume any superiority over him—who had been as sly about it as any ordinary girl—would have given herself to him by that time, and be altogether in his power. The young man whistled in sheer lightheartedness as he changed his dress. After this she could never mount her high horse, and show her superior sentiments, as of yore. The first thing he did when his toilette was accomplished *was to write her* a note. It was the first

communication of the kind which had ever passed between them, but the fact did not excite him as it does most young lovers. Poor Mr. Lothian, on the eminence of his fifty years, would have written to Isabel with very different feelings; but Stapylton took it calmly, not being of an imaginative turn. His letter was as follows:—

"Dearest Isabel,—I was in an awful state of mind when I found you did not turn up to-day at the usual spot. I felt furious I can assure you, and called you a jilt and a dozen other names. But I hear you've been ill, and I forgive you, my darling. Of course it never would have answered to set out in the rain on such a frightful day if you were ill. I got soaked to the skin waiting for you, which I hope you will be sorry to hear. But, Isabel, remember to-morrow is the last day. Go I must to-morrow. If you can't pick yourself up and get well, and join me at the same place and the same hour, I shall go mad, I think, for I must go. My people are writing letters upon letters. There's one waiting for me now, but I have not opened it, for they're all pretty much the same thing over again. They've written to Mr. Lothian, and to Smeaton at the farm, for information as to what detains me; and I must not risk it any longer. But of course, when you know it's so necessary, I can trust to your spirit to get well, and join me as I arranged. We'll have a run into Edinburgh and do the business, and then I can write home. I don't care much about seeing sights myself, but it will all be new to you, and *you*'ll enjoy it. So get well, my pet, as fast as ever *you* can, and remember to-morrow at the old place at

two o'clock. I'll have a trap waiting on the hill: but for heaven's sake don't be late.

"You may think me joking, but I never was more serious in my life. That is my way, as you know. I can't look solemn and use big words like you Scotch. But I mean it all the same. If you don't love me enough to come to me to-morrow, I'll take it for granted you don't love me at all. I will go right away by myself, and I can't hold out any hope to you that I will ever come back. Now don't mistake me, or think I am threatening you. I have waited long enough, and you must not make a fool of me any longer. If I am once driven away, the chances are I can never return to Loch Diarmid—or to you. Come then now. It is our only chance. I will wait for you to-morrow as I did to-day. I shall be there at half-past one, and I shall wait till a quarter after two. No longer. You must be punctual. It's for you to decide if we are to be together for ever, or separated for ever. I can do no more. To-morrow at the old place, or most likely never in this world.

"Come, Isabel, my darling, come! Don't fail me. If you do, I will never see you more.

"Yours, if you will have me,

"H. S."

When he had finished this epistle he read it over with a little complacency. If anything would do it, surely this would do it; though, indeed, there was no reason to believe that Isabel required any special entreaty. As he thought it over, it occurred to him that probably she had fainted out of sheer aggravation and passion *when she found she* could not go to him; and

that was easily comprehensible. When he had folded his note, and got up to find some wax to seal it (for envelopes were not common articles in those days), he found the letters Mr. Lothian had told him of on the table, and tore the first that came uppermost open, suddenly, holding still his love-letter in his hand. His face grew heavy as he read, and pale. He went back to his chair and hurried through it, and the other which accompanied it. They were written on the same day, and to the same purpose. His father was ill. One of the letters was from his sister, the other from the doctor.

"Come for mamma's sake," wrote the first. "Papa is fearfully angry, and threatens to change his will. For your own sake don't waste a moment."

"Your father is dying," said the doctor. "There is not a moment to lose. He is clamouring for a lawyer. Everything that I can do to postpone this you may be sure I will. But come! you may yet be in time."

Young Stapylton wiped the heavy moisture from his forehead and stared into the air as if he had been staring at himself. "Clamouring for a lawyer!"—"threatening to change his will!" Horace was not a devoted son, but such words as these penetrate the most callous heart. After the first shock he set himself to consider with a promptitude that did him credit. There was not a moment to lose. After all, it was just as well he had packed his bag. He would borrow the miller's horse and the minister's old gig, and there was still time perhaps to get to Glasgow before the English mail should be gone. But there was not a moment to lose. It was only when he sprang up to prepare for immediate departure that he found the note to Isabel crushed in his hand, and bethought himself

her. He sat down again hastily and added a
rds to it: and he was in the act of sealing it at
thian's writing-table when the minister came
n then a spark of malice crossed his mind. E
the best messenger he could find to carry his l
r—and it would be a Parthian arrow, a fare
at his adversary.
"My father is ill," he said; "I must go instan
re is just time to catch the coach for Glasgo
drew White will lend me his mare. I am goin
him now."
"Going—instantly?" said the minister, stupi
king at the two letters on the table. Stapy
hered them carefully up and nodded in reply.
"I shall see you again," he said. "I must r
now to the mill. I may have the gig, I supp
look here," he continued, coming back from
r. "There's one good turn you can do me, if
l. If not I'll send it by some one else; will
e this note for me to the Glebe when you go?"
The minister started slightly and coloured high,
made a little ceremonious bow at the same t
held out his hand. "I will take it," he
vely; and then, perhaps out of the softening of
rt towards the young fellow, who was thus
y at such a moment, leaving him master of
d—for to be left master of the field is very sof
and consolatory to the soul—he laid his hand u
pylton's arm. "The doctor says it is but grief
ation—you'll be glad to hear it," he said.
"Yes, yes," cried Stapylton, scarcely taking in
ds; "and I may have the gig? There is not a
t to lose."

CHAPTER XXI.

WHEN Stapylton was gone Mr. Lothian looked round him with a certain stupefaction, not able to comprehend the sudden relief and freedom. Could it be possible, that the companion to whom he had been so long tied was gone; that all the alarming possibilities of his presence were over; that Isabel was free from him; that everything was safe? Perhaps for the first moment a thrill of personal hope that the field was clear for himself was in the good man's mind; but that, to do him justice, was not all. Some other suitor younger and more like her than himself might still come in to woo Isabel and win her. But there was, at least, the hope that this problematical lover would be more like her, more capable of appreciating her, than to the minister's eyes Stapylton had ever been. No doubt he was prejudiced in his judgment. When one man imposes himself on another for months, *bon gré mal gré*, more than an ordinary amount of virtue is necessary not to impute every crime on earth to the undesirable companion; and Mr. Lothian's virtue had not been equal to the trial. Though Stapylton had not injured him in any conspicuous way, though he had never positively lied to him, done him no absolute harm in anybody's opinion, the minister set him down with unconscious ferocity as capable of anything. Had he heard suddenly next day that his former guest had forged or robbed or perjured himself, that he had betrayed trust and outraged weakness, that he had half-a-dozen wives living, or that he had murdered five of them, Mr. Lothian, albeit so good and indulgent in his ordinary disposition, would have

ed every word. "I always knew it;" he would said, "I never trusted him;" which indeed was upon the young man, who, except that he loved f above all created things, had as yet done no particularly wrong. And the relief of his de was beyond expression. Mr. Lothian put the which he had undertaken to carry on the mantle of his study, and walked all over the house with le, only half aware what he was doing, to make hat his troublesome inmate was gone. Then he ver for the Dominie, and ordered up those rials" which are euphemistically entitled "the ter" in respectable Scotch houses. He felt dis to make a night of it in a modest, sober, clerical Isabel was better and Stapylton was gone. The ings together raised his satisfaction almost beyond rrow limits of content.

Yes, he's gone!" he said, when the Dominie d, "thank heaven!—I am not an impatient —"

As long as things go your own way."

And longer, ye sneering body," said the minister own way!—much of that I have had in this But never mind. He was a thorn in my flesh, merciful Providence has removed him. If there as an occasion of rejoicing, it's now."

Well, well," said the Dominie, "I have no objec to rejoice. He was a lad without regard for his s, which is unlovely in youth. And ye were d up in one house with him, besides other draw that we need not discuss. And so there's been ickness at the Glebe? It is an unlucky house!"

"Is it damp, do ye think?" asked the minister, with instant alarm.

"If ye'll tell me a corner of the parish that's not damp!" said the Dominie; "but I meant nothing. What I would have said was that it had no look if ye do not object to the word. First the poor mother—and then Margaret."

"But with twenty years between," said the minister, quickly.

"Ay, that's true, man!" cried the Dominie; "a man gets little better than a vegetable living on in such a place as this. I would have said it was scarce twenty months. The loch 's always the same ye see, and the hills—and seedtime, and harvest, and all the rest. A man gets as senseless as an auld tree. I've been five-and-twenty years here."

"Ten years longer than me," said the minister, with defective grammar.

"Ten years is a nothing, a moment, the twinkling of an eye. I set little store by your ten years. But there are some things that change for all that. No the bairns to speak of, for they are about the same standard, and awfu' like each other from generation to generation. On the whole, I think there's nothing changes but a man himself," said the Dominie, musing. He had made his toddy, and was stirring it thoughtfully with the spoon. Then, suddenly, all at once, he raised his bright old eyes to his friend's face, and smiled according to his wont.

"You are thinking what a spectacle I was for a young man," he said, "and that's just what I was thinking myself. I am greatly of opinion that there are some men that never pass twenty; and some that

are born a hundred. I'm one of the last. I never had an hour's comfort, so far as I can mind, till I was an old dotard, as ye see me. Here's your health, Lothian, and wishing ye joy. You're about twenty yourself."

"Alas!" said the minister, but not without a gleam of pleasure, "fifty well chappit, as they say; but it is not a matter of years—altogether," he added, with a sigh.

"Altogether?—ye mean not a bit!" said the Dominie. "Come, my lad, let us make up our minds for that, to-night, at least. Ye have shaken this young fellow off your shoulders, and it's a poor heart that never rejoices. That's good whisky. Ye'll get it at Auckinglass?—"

"It's pure Glenlivat," said the minister; "I had it sent me ten years ago; though that is but a moment, as you say it ripens the juice of the barley, as well as the juice of the grape."

"Dinna be too Scriptural, my friend," said Mr. Galbraith; "in the lightness of your heart ye may play pliskies with the word. And so he's gone; you're quite sure he's gone? No likely to come in as we are speaking, and up to this table with a insolent colour in his cheeks, and youth in his eyes, and order in another glass as if he were master and more? If I were you I would never have lost sight of him till he was in the coach."

"And lost my quiet evening?" said the minister. "No, no, he is safe enough. And, besides, there was never any love lost between us. He would have been amazed had I offered—and I should have made sure *he saw through me all the* time."

"So the thought occurred to you," said the Dominie, shaking his head over his toddy, with an amused smile.

"I confess it did—not for my own sake, Galbraith; but I would not have had him try to get an interview with—that poor child at the Glebe."

"I thought that was where we were coming," said the Dominie, under his breath.

"Where else could we be coming? There was no other personal question between Stapylton and me."

The Dominie played a march on the table with his finger. "It's very good whisky," he said; "but I like the kettle by the fire for my part. That bit brass thing on the table is like a fine lady. Give me the sonsy, black kettle that sits and sings and pleases all the senses by the fireside."

"If your tumbler's done," said the minister, "we'll have it in; it is not every night we celebrate the feast of liberation."

"My tumbler's no done, and has no such intention," said the Dominie. "No, no—let us give no hold to the adversary; but if the water was boiling I would not object to an eke. If we went the length of two tumblers in the present state of the parish, who can say the Manse would not tumble in on our heads? But the very prophets themselves could see no harm in an eke."

"It's more insidious," said the minister, as he rang the bell; but gravity returned to his face before the kettle had been brought "ben" from the kitchen, black and polished and steaming, and placed on the hob as on a not unaccustomed place. "To return to our subject—"

"I'm in no mood to return to any subject," s
Dominie, "except the whisky. I know noth
r than the fumes of a fresh tumbler, or rather,
—the spirit of the spirit breathing away in
erial vapour just as the rest of it rises in a ma
n. I could understand some bit creature of
osphere getting aërially fou, before we gross a
s have had our first sip. Yes, I see what you
aking—he is fou himself the havering body; noth
the kind, I am as sober as a judge—and no
icated with other fumes like you."

"It's but a poor kind of intoxication," said
ister, shaking his head, "and little chance of sa
ion coming with it. There's a letter there
mised him to deliver—"

"I would rather put it in the fire," said the
ie, "and tell the lassie she's well rid of him. W
nk ye of this new move? It will be a good
ce for the parish; but I am sorry for poor Aili
e's but an innocent thing when all's said; and as
ck John, if he's no crackit, he's worse."

"He was mad, or something near it," said
thian. "I am not without sympathy for the m
e death of Margaret Diarmid drove him mad.
n't think you ever did him justice—her death dr
n out of all bounds."

"To marry one woman off-hand is a queer w
showing your grief for another," said the Domi
I have not examined the phenomena of love-mak
yself with sufficient care to know; but it is no
m of grieving common to see, and it's no g
mpliment to the living woman whatever it may
the dead."

"Poor Ailie!" the minister said. "What will happen to so sensitive a creature when she puts her inspiration to the test among strangers, with John Diarmid by her side?"

"She'll not live," said the Dominie, "that is the best solution of all these knotty questions. There will be first a shock of surprise to find that she does not carry everything before her as she expected: and then a struggle between hope and disappointment, and then a sick heart, and then—some fine day she'll catch cold, or get a fever, and she'll die—and there will be an end of a creature with no harm in her, only uplifted by—what is it?—can you tell?"

The minister shook his head—"Temperament," he said.

"Vanity?" said the Dominie.

"Neither the one nor the other, but something of both, and something more—stop: you're an old Moderate, Galbraith. You believe in nothing that's beyond flesh and blood. Yes, something more. I cannot tell you what it is—if it's from heaven above or earth beneath—if it's some influence of spirits we have no cognizance of. But there is something more than excitement, or temperament, or vanity. I don't call it prophecy, as they do; but it is the same thing that fell on the multitude when Peter preached. Mind, I give it no importance, but it is the same thing."

Mr. Lothian spoke with a little excitement, and perhaps it was the first time he had suffered himself to go so far. As for the Dominie, he puffed clouds of smoke from his protruded underlip with a certain cynical protestation against the other's enthusiasm.

"I think I may venture on another brew," he said,

you're getting to that exaltation. I was not awa
ye admitted all their claims in that enthusiast
If it's the Primitive Church come back, that
ey ever asserted, as you well know."
"They asserted a great deal more," said the ministe
excitement—"that the Primitive Church was pe
and to be our model in everything—which is n
opinion, nor was it Paul's. If you mark the litt
he sets by tongues and prophesying——"
"I am thankful to think it is none of my bus
," said Mr. Galbraith. "Paul and I have little
with each other in a professional point of view.
not think he was the man to stand interference o
or another. But we may as well make use
kettle while it's boiling. There is still some co
on the high ground, and I hear it's spoiling wi
his rain."
"It's the plague of the west country," said M
ian; "we have our compensations, but it's ha
n the farmers all the same. My own opinion h
ys been that they should pay more attention
beasts and let the corn alone."
"But you want great farms for that, and capital
the Dominie. "In all professions it would be
d thing to have a race of bachelors once in
ury or so, that would give their mind and the
ey to the land, for instance, instead of wasting
e bringing up of bairns. Land is aye thankf
gives a return; whereas lads—or lasses either f
matter——"
"Ye old cynical bachelor body!" said the ministe
uld ye have everybody a dry stick like you
?"

"Maybe no, where the uxorial and parental qualities are developed as they are in you. Besides, unless you were to amass a fortune out of your stipend and endow a bursary, I cannot see what good a minister can do,—in that kind, be it understood. But it's time to break up our sederunt," said the Dominie, finishing his last "eke," "or the elders and the wives would all be scandalized. You're such an impressionable youth that the parish is of opinion you're no just safe in the company of an auld Moderate, as ye call me."

"It's as much as I can do to hold my own," said Mr. Lothian with a smile, and the two old friends went together through the silent house to the door. It was not late, but the servants were in bed and everything shut up. The minister accompanied his Guest to the gate. It was very dark, black as night only is in the country, and up or down as far as could be seen, there was no light visible, except a certain glimmering paleness where the loch lay, and the candle set in the Dominie's window to guide him home through the gloom. The air was damp and chill with the recent rain, the burn trickling unseen through the night, all the mystery of darkness enclosing the two solitary figures at the gate. When they parted life was still on Loch Diarmid, and nothing but the two faint twinkles of light from the minister's study and the Dominie's bedroom, where the latter betook himself without delay to sleep, broke the intense blackness in which all that homely existence and so many passions and agitations were hid.

Mr. Lothian returned to his room and opened the window softly with a certain reverence for the solem-

nity of the night. The great rose-bush, as usual, dewed him all over with rain from its branches, and thrust its sharp-pointed leaves into his face as he looked out. It was to clear the air of the smoke that he did it, but yet it was impossible to resist the fascination of the impenetrable darkness which tempted him to gaze, as everything unfathomable always does. Then he returned to the fireside and looked for the hundredth time at the letter on the mantelpiece. It had no address, Stapylton in his haste having forgotten that necessary detail. Would it be a sin to drop the nameless thing into the fire which burned so temptingly underneath? A sin against whom?—against the stranger to whom he owed nothing, whom he had been much kinder to than he deserved, who had no claim in any way upon his aid—or against Isabel, whose life he felt would be delivered from its greatest danger were Stapylton once and definitively banished away from her thoughts? Alas! that was not the question. He could not take refuge in any pretext of good to come. It would be a sin against honour. He was bound to carry the thing, whatsoever poison might lurk inside. Though it might agitate, or even destroy the life that was so dear to him; though it might plant new thorns in her innocent way and perplex her overburdened heart; and though he himself would willingly have been cut in little pieces to keep that heart in peace—yet he must do it: there was no possible question on the point. He put it into his pocket out of sight and out of danger, with a sigh.

Next morning Mr. Lothian went to the Glebe as early *as he could permit* himself to go, though his

heart had been on the way for hours before he permitted his reluctant footsteps to follow. He found Isabel lying on the sofa in the parlour, in the very spot where Margaret had died, and naturally the association of ideas struck him profoundly. "Why have you laid her there?" he said to Jean, turning back from the door. There went a chill to his heart as if he had seen the tragedy all acted over again, and heard that the end was already approaching.

Jean Campbell stared at him, only partially comprehending what he could mean. "Where else could I put her," she said, "unless it was ben in the kitchen with me? and the doctor says she's to be kept quiet. And it's mair cheerful there than in a bedroom, where she could see nobody."

"Cheerful!" echoed the minister.

"Eh ay real cheerful," said Jean, in whose mind perpetual use and wont had subdued the force of melancholy associations. "When I've put the sofa she can see the road, and the loch, and the steamboat, which is real diverting—and I'm aye coming and going to keep her cheery myself. She's no to call ill. It's but the sorrow and the weakness and a' her trouble. We've no need to be alarmed about her health, he says."

Mr. Lothian, silenced by this matter of fact treatment of the subject, went into the parlour, feeling even his own apprehensions a little calmed down. To fly from the habitual house because of anything that had happened in it—to abandon the simple sitting-room of the family, because death had come in by its door, was indeed an impossibility—and even Isabel did not seem to be conscious of the awe and thrill of something like

fear with which her visitor perceived her surroundings. She was very pale, but quiet, in that languor, half of suffering, half of recovery, which makes a slight illness a relief at once to body and mind. She had been ill enough to be sharply recalled out of all dreaming to a consciousness of herself, and the existence which still remained to her. She had learned once more to realize the sensation of bodily comfort, and the consolation of being watched and waited upon and tended. And another great event in her life, a thing unknown except to herself, but all the more powerful on that account in its influence, had come between her and the freshness of her grief. Therefore Isabel was a new creature. She was reclining on Margaret's sofa, which had never been for an hour out of her sight since Margaret's death upon it, and, without any terror of the associations surrounding her, was gradually awakening in all her youthful being. Her mind had recovered its tone. She had been alone with no companion but the fire for the greater part of the day, from the moment when Jean's heart was set at rest by the doctor's visit, and had been thinking about many things. She could not understand now the state of excitement into which she had been thrown by Stapylton's proposal. Her heart was hot with anger at him, and almost disgust with herself. And yet her heart clung to him still. But in that little interval she seemed to herself to have grown ever so much older and wiser. She would send for him, she thought, openly in the eye of day. She would say to him that if he came back and sought her at a fit time, she would wait for him, and give him all her thoughts; but if not——*She had framed in* her own mind over and

over the words she would say to him: a gentle reproach for the unworthy thought that she should care so little for Margaret's memory, a soft remonstrance against his haste and wilfulness. "It is as easy to come back as it is to go away," Isabel had made up her mind to say. "It is not as if it were over the seas;" and I'm not so poor nor of such common folk that you should think shame to speak of me." She thought with foolish youthful hope that such words would overcome all his selfish resolution, that he would overwhelm her with prayers for pardon, and dear protestations of all she was to him. Such protestations were, to tell the truth, very little in Stapylton's way; but yet she was able to invent and believe in them, with all the obstinate idealism of her age and character. She was deep in such thoughts when the minister came in casting a shadow as of another life upon her. One moment she had been glowing with tender indignation asking Horace in her heart, how he could,—oh, how he could make so cruel a proposal to her? and then rising into simple pride, was she such a one as he would be ashamed to name to his mother? and then, softening ineffably over him, that she would wait and write, and count the long days till he came back. The glow of those reflections had not faded from her cheek when Mr. Lothian's shadow fell over her. It chilled her just a little. She knew too well what were his feelings towards herself to be quite at ease with him. He had been as delicate of her feelings as the other had been inconsiderate; but the very contrast in his favour gave her a certain touch of resentment towards himself. And neither were without embarrassment when he thus came and sat down by her side.

am very glad to hear you are better?" he

h, yes. I never was ill to speak of. I know I was ill," said Isabel, turning away her head.
hen perhaps the rest and quiet is all you want?" e minister, not knowing in his agitation what to And then there was a pause. There were a d things which he had longed to say to her, uld not when the moment thus came. He felt some cruel necessity was upon him to think of ret—to remind her that Margaret had died just she was lying—to beg her to change her attitude, ok, which made his heart sick with terror. He restrain himself with an effort from suggesting this strange topic. And perhaps the other things tempted to say would have been less palatable At last, after a perplexed and painful pause, he t out of his pocket the letter of which he was willing bearer.

I have a letter for you," he said, "it was left me last night."

A letter!" said Isabel, growing pale, and then she it about in her hands, and looked at it. "It has dress."

It was put up in such haste," said Mr. Lothian. el, will you read it now, in case I can give you xplanation?—or shall I go away?"

It is from——"

Horace Stapylton. I gave my promise I would it—though against my will."

abel gazed at him, for a moment growing pale. eld the letter helplessly in her hand. What could an? It had been *left* with him last night. He

could perhaps give some explanation? What could h
mean? Her pulse began to beat again as it had no
done since her faint. She made Mr. Lothian a littl
sign with her hand to stay, for he had risen and stoo
quite apart from her in the centre of the room. The
with a hasty hand she tore open the letter. When th
minister gave a stolen glance at her, he could see tha
her cheeks were growing more and more flushed an
feverish. The colour on them was no passing glow o
delight and modesty, but the burning red of excite
ment and sudden passion. She went over it all rapidly
and then she uttered a low cry. Mr. Lothian glance
at her, but, seeing that the cry was unconscious
betook himself again to the window with what calm
ness was possible. Isabel had come to the postscrip
He did not look round again for what seemed to hi
an age. He stood with such feelings as may b
imagined, gazing blankly out on the familiar scen
before him—knowing that her whole mind was o
cupied with his rival's farewell—knowing what wa
worse, or, at least believing, that his rival was u
worthy of her. Mr. Lothian represented to himself tha
it was this that was the sting. She was utterly ab
sorbed, forgetting everything in Stapylton's letter, an
he was not worthy to unloose the latchet of her sho
But whether this sympathetic feeling or simple rivalr
was the more prominent emotion in his mind, it
certain that the pain was so great that it bewildere
and benumbed him. He stood not knowing how tim
went, feeling that it might be a month or a centur
wondering if life after all were not the saddest of mi
takes, and envying poor Margaret, blessed Margar
in her early grave. What roused him at last was t

rustle of the paper falling to the ground, and turning round hastily, he found Isabel with her face buried in her hands in a passion of tears. This was hard to bear. He went back to his seat beside the sofa, and picking up the letter laid it gently on her lap; and then he touched her shoulder softly with a fatherly, caressing hand, and said, "My poor child! my poor child!" in a voice that came out of the very depths of his heart.

Then Isabel uncovered hastily her passionate, tear-stained face.

"It is not that!" she cried—"it is not that! Oh, I think shame! Am I one to be spoken to so?—is it my doing? I think my heart will break! Take it and read it, and tell me if it is my doing, before I die of shame."

He could only gaze at her, wondering if her mind were unhinged; but hasty Isabel, all ablaze with passion and misery, could not stop to think. She took up the letter,—her lover's letter, and thrust it into his rival's hand.

"If it is my doing,—oh, never speak to me again!" she cried. Shame and anger, and disappointment and anguish, were all tearing her asunder. And she had no Margaret to go to, to relieve her. Some one must give her that support and solace which her heart demanded, or she felt she must die. She hung upon his looks as he read it, reading his expression.

"Could it be my fault?" she cried. "Oh, Mr. Lothian, was I such a light lass? Was it anything I did that made him write like that to me?"

"No, Isabel," he said, with a blaze of rage in his eyes, *taking her feverish hand.* "No, Isabel. My dear,

think no more of it. It is that he understands neither yours nor you."

And then instinctively, in an instant, hasty Isabel felt the mistake she had made, and felt that she could not bear any criticisms upon her lover even now. She took back her letter as suddenly as she had given it, and folded it up with trembling hands.

"He does not understand," said Mr. Lothian, altogether unconscious of this rapid revolution. "You speak a language he cannot comprehend. The women he knows are a different species. Isabel, I have never said a word against him—"

"No," she cried, hurriedly. "No; I am always a fool, and never know what I am doing. No. Dinna say a word now."

Then he stopped suddenly, the very words arrested on his lips, and gazed at her wondering, not knowing what she could mean.

"You don't understand me either," cried Isabel. "Oh, not a word—not a word! You cannot judge him right; you never saw him like me. He was bewildered with the news; he never meant that."

"If I were to say the like, would you ever forgive me?" said the minister, shaking his head. She answered only by weeping, a mode of reply which took all power of remonstrance or protestation away from the spectator. A hundred contradictory emotions were in Isabel's tears. Shame and pain over the letter; shame still sharper, if not so deep, that she had offered it to the criticism of another; wrath against Stapylton; rage at herself; and a certain bitterness against her companion for not taking her lover's part to her, for not *contradicting* her, and pleading his rival's cause. She

d not have spoken all this wild jumble of pain a
ion; but she poured it all forth in tears.
It was the postscript which had specially excit
and which ran as follows:—
"I have just heard that my father is ill, and
go. I would have waited till to-morrow ev
, but I hear he might alter his will, which wou
r do. It is all your own fault. I was reac
ing for you—as you know. What could a man
? If you will come, and meet me somewhere
Border, as soon as this business is settled, you w
me as ready then as I was to-day. No time
a word more."
Mr. Lothian once more left her side, and we
to the window in his perplexity.
"I should not disturb you," he said, with his ba
r. "I should go away. But it is grievous to s
e your tears. I would give my very blood
one tear falling from your eyes. And he wou
g tears of blood out of your heart; and yet he
n, and I am rejected. What more can I have
?"
"Nothing! oh, nothing!" cried Isabel. "Oh, w
not understand? I would like to hide myself
depths of the earth. I was going to him yesterda
I fainted. I have kept it a secret, and it w
a lie burning in my heart. Now I have told yo
ould have gone with him if I had kept in li
t better am I than him? He is free to speak, I
es I am no better. It is my fault, and not h
now you know," cried the girl, clasping her p
te hands together, "and you may despise me!
im tempt me; I could not bear the awfu' qui

I'll cure you at least, if I shame myself. It was me that was to blame."

"But I am not cured. I'll never be cured, my dear, my dear!" cried the grey-haired man, coming back to her, with tears in his eyes, and taking her hands into his own. "It was your innocence, and your grief. Do you think I do not know of the struggle that was at your heart?"

She left her hands indifferently in his, not seeming to care for, nor scarcely to perceive, his emotion. She fixed her eyes vacantly upon the air, with great tears rising in them.

"And Margaret knows it all," she said; two piteous tears, the very essence of her pain, dilated her eyes into two great globes, but did not fall. Self-abasement could go no further. Margaret, in heaven, would not despise her sister. But what could she think of the variable, miserable creature who, fresh from her own death-bed, could be tempted by such a poor temptation, and think such thoughts as these?

CHAPTER XXII.

While all this had been going on at the Glebe, a drama of a different kind was evolving itself among scenes of strange devotion, and plans as wild as enthusiast ever formed, at the other corner of the Loch. Mr. John's madness had come to a height on the night of Margaret's death. The sudden announcement of that event falling on him at a moment when he had already worked himself into a kind of frenzy, had brought to a climax this supreme crisis of his being.

He went away from Ailie's cottage, vaguely wandering across the gloomy moor to the Glebe, and throwing himself down there on the wet heather, watched through the starless, solitary night within sight of the melancholy house which held his dead love. It was such a night's watching as sometimes changes the entire tenor of a life. Fables of hair growing grey, or faces taking the print of years in a single night, do but express the merest outside semblance of the effect which such a measureless cycle of time—or rather of something which was not time, which was long and ruthless as ages, yet brief as the twinkling of an eye—can make upon a man's being. With a body exhausted by watching, with a mind kept preternaturally awake by the highest strain of passion—grief, remorse, self-condemnation, personal misery, the man watched through all the awful hours of darkness; not a tear relieved his burning eyes, nor did the eyelids ever close upon them or modify even for a moment his passionate fixed gaze through the blackness of the night upon the unseen house. He could no more see the house than he could see his love, the only love of his heart, lying white and shrouded within it, but everything was present to him in vivid imagination; his own soiled and feverish life, the first impression she had made upon him, the habitual evil thought with which before her pure influence had time to work, he had regarded even Margaret. And then his loss of her, the revulsion of his frantic soul, the descent into hell, the wild flight out of it, the sudden contact with inspiration and light from heaven, and the passion of religion which seemed at first as if it must make him amends for all the other *lost and evil passions of his* life. And now what was

this termination of all? The end of hope for heaven and earth? or else God's awful way of trying in the furnace and proving by fire, the servant who was yet to do, for Him, something above any recorded mission of prophet or of saint?

Strange thrills ran over the impassioned watcher as he sat on the desolate braes, with his eyes gazing into that painful gloom; voices awoke in his heart with which his will had nothing to do—indeed, had he not thrown away his own will, cast himself with open ears and anguished soul at God's feet, to hear whatever should be said to him, to suffer whatsoever might be inflicted, to be moved by angel or spirit or aught that moved in the silent night, in which he alone moved and breathed, the one sentient being capable of influence from above or from beneath? What had his will or his thoughts to do with it? Out of the awful silence, out of his own heart, out of the air and the very soil, voices seemed to wake and whisper. "Companion of devils, false love, murderer, Cain!" one seemed to shout at him; another caught and rent him, like the spirits in the Gospel, with unearthly, inarticulate cries; another seemed to mock and tempt him, flashing before his eyes wild pictures of the past, reminding him of those excitements of vice in which a tortured spirit may sometimes forget itself; and then the infernal chorus would be silent, and another band not less wild would take up the strain, bidding him to go forth and teach the nations, to heal and bless, to curse and denounce, to proclaim judgment and salvation.

Who could so well fulfil that mission as a man delivered out of hell and the grave? They bade him

proclaim, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven
and!" "Son of man, behold I take from thee
ire of thine eyes at a stroke; but thou shalt no
or mourn." This mystic voice of anguish echo
er the buried ages seemed to ring out loudly
nore over the midnight wild in John Diarmid'
Was he not as Ezekiel in the greatness of hi
Had not God set him as a sign before thi
, before his generation, and the world? Ther
ld force of that which he and all around hin
ed to be inspiration came upon the solitary man
gh the silence he spoke in his strange ecstas
g forth those sounds which were unintelligible t
f as well as to others. But there are moment
ch all passion becomes unspeakable, and in whic
ulate utterance, in music, in sighing, in groans
tcries,—anything that will utter the meaning o
t without words, is a certain relief. The utter
rent him asunder, but left him with a sense o
r and exhaustion in which was the first touc
solation he had yet felt. And then did he dream
d the angels come and soothe him, with dizz
s of light about them, and soft airs of Paradis
their wings fanning his feverish forehead? It wa
that revealed to him the mission he was to accom
, he and the prophetess whom he was to take t
not clearly with any geographical or economica
l, but vaguely as angelic indications are. In
t island among the seas they were to find the ex
t people who should understand the tongues the
and receive the message they had to deliver
were to go forth and seek this refuge, preachin
y went, like the Apostles, taking no though

what they should say, uttering such words and such languages as the Lord might give them. A vision of listening throngs along all the dusty paths; of "the Spirit" falling here on one and there on the other, of strangers standing up as they did in Jerusalem, and blessing God for the new revelation; of devils and diseases flying before them, and a millennium only waiting for the accomplished work, rolled out before him in the exaltation of his weariness and despair. When the morning suddenly woke and looked him in the face, the man woke shivering too, and confronted it, not knowing where he was. And then another wave of great anguish rolled over him, and he crept to the pale house which grew faintly distinguishable in the dawning, and made his way round and round it, groping by the wall, blinded not by tears, but by some mist of misery that came before his eyes. And then by-and-bye found himself at home, not knowing how he had got there, nor when.

The result of this terrible watch was an illness against which he fought with feverish passion, never resting nor stopping one of his ordinary occupations. He was in the churchyard on the day of Margaret's funeral, shivering and burning, and scarcely able to sustain himself, but keeping up by force of will, grasping at the cold tombstones, stopping the melancholy train, as it dispersed, to hear "the word of the Lord."

"You have closed her up in her grave," he cried his voice hoarse with sickness and passion; "but when He comes, think you, your green turf and your cold stones will hide His saint from giving Him a welcome."

"Come home! come home!" said the minister, ap

aching the haggard prophet, with a compassion
hich there was some touch of fellow feeling, "
e too ill to be out of your bed, much less here."
"By God's grace I will never yield to what
ll illness," said Mr. John; "is it for me to rest
them leave the place where they have laid her,
arts like stones in their bosoms. Is she to have li
and is she to die, in vain?"
"Mr. John, this is worse than folly," said
thian; "no one here will let Margaret's dear n
made an occasion of strife. For her sake, go h
d take thought, and rest."
"For her sake, I will rest no more till He co
till I die," cried the inspired madman: "but I
t die, I will live and declare the works of
rd."
There were many of the wondering party thus
ated who believed that Mr. John had been betra
his grief into a new vice, the most common fai
the country-side. "He's been drinking," they
ong themselves: "puir fellow!—to make him for
Na, na, it's no drink, it's grief," said others. "
a are ye that speak like them in Jerusalem," c
third party, "'they're drunk with new wine,' v
was the Spirit of the Lord?"
And then, a few days later, it became know
e parish that he had bidden Ailie Macfarlane in
me of God to become his wife, and excitement
ry high on Loch Diarmid. Something in the
nate, haggard face, which looked like that of a
the point of death, and yet was to be seen
an ever at kirk and market, awed the common
d threw a certain light of reality upon those

perate and tragic motives which had led him to such a proposal.

"He's lost Margret for this world; and now he thinks to force the Lord to come afore His ain time and get her back," said Jenny Spence.

"And Ailie—poor thing!—is to be his tool that he'll work with. I see his meaning—a' his meaning, as clear as daylight. He's out o' his wits about Margret Diarmid; and he's ta'en to the drink for consolation," said another gossip, "and he hasna strength to stand it. It'll be his death, and that you'll see."

But it was not his death; on the contrary, he related publicly in his meetings how he had fought with his illness and overcome it, thus strengthening the evidence that sickness and suffering were from Satan, and could be overcome by faith. Thanks to his constitution, or to the sustaining force of excitement, he shook off the fever which was on him, and came to himself, and every day had further revelations, and spoke more fully of the mission with which he had been charged to the world.

Poor Ailie, however, on her side, was of a very different mind. When "the word of the Lord" had burst upon her on that night of Margaret's death, her very heart had failed in dismay and consternation She had implicitly believed all that had been revealed to herself of her own mission, and was ready to set out at any moment without staff or scrip, with all the simplicity of a child. But her faith failed her when Mr. John's strange proposal fell on her ear. "Is this a time for marrying or giving in marriage?" she asked with something like indignation, when, with infinitely greater vehemence, he renewed his commands to her

handmaid of the Lord. "Is not the time of H
ring near? and are we to be burdened wit
ly ties and earthly troubles when the Lord come
ain work? Oh, man! I'm no made to be on
helpmeet. There are plenty round you that a
for that; it's my meat and my drink to serv
I couldna think of the flesh to please my hu
but of the Spirit to please the Lord."

"And yet you contradict His Spirit and refuse H
ge," said Mr. John," "which I brought to yo
the darkness of the night,—out of a mind re
torn with pain, not lightly, or with commo
hts, but from His presence. Will you please Hi
jecting His word?"

"But it might be a lying spirit," said Ailie. "
be to tempt us,—as if you and me had need
ce in the flesh."

"We have need of alliance for the work," he sai
his great, heavy, passionate eyes fixed upon he
have gone before, but never man and woma
Lord has said to me, Go in to the prophetes
not to take unto thee thy wife. If you disobe
in be upon your head."

"But it has never been revealed to me," crie
her cheeks crimsoning with shame, and white
terror. "When there have been messages co
ing this life, they have been revealed to them th
to profit, and no to another. And in the mout
wo or three is every testimony to be establishe
e word comes to me I'll no resist the Lord."

"The head of the woman is her husband," sai
John, loftily, "it is the sign of God's will toward
If you are to be given to me, your instruction

your directions, must come through my hands. It is to me it is revealed, for I am the head. Listen to the Lord's voice. Want of faith has laid one head low that should have shone above us all. Will you let it overcome you now that have triumphed in your time? Ailie, beware! The blasphemy that cannot be pardoned, and the sin that may not be forgiven, is the sin against the Holy Ghost."

"But I canna see it! I canna see it!" cried poor Ailie, bursting into tears. Her dignity seemed to have deserted her, and all her spiritual gifts. She kept in-doors, shut up in her room, spending her time in feverish prayers and divinations from the Bible. "I will do what the Lord wills," she said to herself and others twenty times in a day; but when any text which seemed to favour Mr. John's cause caught her eye on opening "the Book," she would shut it again hastily, and try again, without any acknowledgment. All her partizans, and indeed the entire parish, took an interest in the question which no previous feature in the movement had elicited to such an extent. The matter was discussed everywhere, involving as it did the interest of a personal romance along with the intense charm of the religious excitement, and calling forth a hundred different opinions. There were some who thought that Ailie—"set her up!"—had with what she aimed at in making herself so conspicuous and that her reluctance was pretence. And there were some who, without going so far, still felt that the proposition of a gentleman's hand thus offered to her, was enough to make the prophetess forget her calling. Even Catherine, who was of a sceptical mind, and had never given in to Ailie's pretensions, was so much moved

kinsman's madness, that it almost broke down
ier which had divided them since the time wh
John's evil ways had finally closed her do
st him. She even hesitated at the church-d
ther she would not pause and accost him, and
t reason could do to turn him from his fatal int
; but was deterred by the haggard look, the wat
dshot eyes, the parched and feverish lips, wh
k her like a revelation. "I understand it
," she said, so much agitated by the supposed
y, that she went in tremulous to the Manse,
ver herself. "It is not a common failing am
Diarmids of the old stock—but that accounts
thing. And as for arguing with a man in t
—"

"You mistake," said the minister; "indeed
ke."

Miss Catherine shook her head. "Well I kn
signs of it," she said; "it is not a failing of
, but when it comes it is all the worse for t
unhappy lad! One would think that the wo
cripture came true, and that such a man was
ed over to Satan for the destruction of the fle

"He has been wrong, no doubt; but not in
," said Mr. Lothian. "It is grief—despair if
; and all this excitement, and agitation, and s
, which he will not give in to—but not what
pose."

Once more Miss Catherine shook her head.
t a distant cousin, thank God," she said to

But yet he was related nearly enough to th
the house of Lochhead a certain share of the
ibility. "I am glad his poor mother is saf

her grave," she added; "ye preach, and ye pr
you ministers, but ye never will persuade the y
what a weary wilderness this world is, nor th
that there's anything but tribulation and sorrow
Will ye marry them when all is done and said?"

This question was asked so abruptly, tha
Lothian was startled. "Marry whom?" he asked

"Those I am speaking of: John Diarmid an
lass. Is it a thing you can bless, you that a
honest man, and know your duty, and have son
perience in this world?"

"My dear Miss Catherine," said the minister,
have too much experience yourself not to know t
they've made up their minds it will make little
ence what I do or what I think. I have no ri
say they are not to marry if they please."

"No; I wish you had," said Miss Catherine, r
"and I wish there was some kind of a real g
ment, or some control, that men should not be
make fools of themselves and put shame upon s
name whenever they please."

"She is not his equal," said Mr. Lothian,
there is no shame."

Miss Catherine marched out of the Manse
strenuously shaking her head. "A lass tha
preached and prayed and ranted in a public p
she said, with a mixture of lofty indignation an
tempt, shaking out her great shawl and rustlin
silk gown, so that the minister felt himself burie
lost in their shadow. And she continued to shal
head as she went majestically alone down the
and took her way home through the village.
was still only recovering from her little illness

not as yet ventured to church. And her patron
ed the pretty, graceful creature, with all her ha
lses, and shy pride, and impatient temper. "A
marry that English vagabond!" the femin
re of Loch Diarmid said to herself, with such
as might, had she been near enough, have cris
waters of the Sabbath-keeping loch. If she co
have taken the affairs of her kindred into her ha
married them her own way, what an improvem
uld have been! Miss Catherine had a due resp
Providence—but still she could not but feel that
respects she could have improved on "its" p
ings, especially in respect to marriages—wh
things which Providence is sadly apt to mismana
l the world knows.

When the minister was left by himself at his o
a sudden impulse seized him to interfere in t
ate matter; or perhaps not to interfere—but
to exercise that privilege of curiosity or inte
h a clergyman, like a woman, is permitted to f
went up the brae towards the little line of cotta
re Ailie lived, with kindness in his heart to
onary girl, notwithstanding all her recent den
lons of his lukewarmness and interference with
ness. Half way up, he met Mr. John coming do
is rapid, excited, breathless way. The two n
ed and came to a stop opposite to each other, w
for the first moment any attempt to speak.
hian was half alarmed when he saw the rava
h so short a time had wrought on the enthusia

He himself looked young and ruddy beside J
nid, who must have been at least a dozen y
nior. There were deep lines under his eyes

about his haggard mouth; his cheeks were hollow, hi
eyes seemed increased in size as well as in fire; and
beard, a wonder in those days, the only symptom b
which he had betrayed the languor of the fever whic
had been consuming him, covered the lower part of h
face. This beard had been visible at church that mor
ing for the first time to the general public, and t
parish had involuntarily looked with distrust upon i
prophet when they saw that symptom of eccentricity
his chin. But Mr. Lothian was not so easily shocke
Nevertheless, it was Mr. John who was the first
speak.

"You will soon be free of us," he said, in his de
voice; "the time of the visitation of Loch Diarmid
nearly at an end. Him that is unworthy let him
unworthy still. We'll hand them back to you a
your sermons. A greater work is opening before
now."

"If you will tell me what it is, I will be glad
said Mr. Lothian. "I have heard, but vaguely. Wh
are you going? and with whom? and to whom? Y
are not a villager, like the rest, Mr. John, but kn
the world."

"I have bought my knowledge dear," he said; "b
I've offered it all up on the altar with the rest. I ma
no stand on my knowledge of the world. Henceforward we know no man after the flesh. I answer yo
we are going to the world; the Lord will direct
where."

"But will you start," cried the minister, "and w
a young woman unused to such fatigue on no bet
indication than that?"

"The same indication that Israel had,—the pil

f cloud by day and the banner of light by night. cannot discuss it with a carnal mind. The Lord rect where we are to go."

"And that is all?"

"That is all; if you had fathomed heaven th, could you know more than that, or ha dance more sure?"

"Mr. John," said Mr. Lothian, with a certain fience; "you know so much better than the hatever they take into their heads they will be but you, who are a man of the world——"

Mr. John gave a sweep of his hand as if it say, "Get thee behind me, Satan," and passe stioner. "I am the servant of the Lord," he ere was in the man's look, in his nervous n nts, in the extraordinary absorbed expression c e, such a sense of the reality of his extraord rpose that the minister found not another wo y. He paused and looked after the wayfarer m way, absorbed and intent upon his own thou wn the hill. It was no vulgar enthusiasm at man of higher training might smile. By whats rocess Mr. John had arrived at it—whether it w nest throughout, or if there had been any dece begin with, it was sufficiently true now. He at lieved in his own mission. Mr. Lothian turne atinued his way with a sigh. There is somethi ch fervour of conviction which moves the m perienced man of thought to a certain envy. N cement in the world could have moved the mi such straightforward, downright belief in any on of reformation. "Therefore, I will never m ultitude," he said to himself, "and who knows—

Who knows? I am a fool for Christ's sake, said Paul who was no fool. Was not there something divine in the conviction, even if that were all?

When the minister reached the cottages on the brae, the first thing that caught his eye was Ailie standing at the open door, her face contracted as if with pain, and her hands clasped fast in each other with a certain beseeching gesture like a silent prayer. There was no conviction in Ailie's face. In the Sabbath quiet, when all the world had retired into their houses, the prophetess stood—"as if it was an every-day," her mother said, who felt the dereliction keenly—at the open door. The girl's face was full of doubt and trouble and nervous disquietude. The man who claimed to share her fate had just left her. He had been fulminating into her ear once more "the message of the Lord." He had upbraided her for her doubt, her love which was failing from the love of espousals, her strength which was growing weary in the way. That lack of faith with which she had reproached Margaret Diarmid was now imputed to herself. And Mr. John had left the prophetess who was to him "the sister, the wife," of apostolic precedent, quivering all over with wounded pride and feeling. Poor Ailie did not know it was pride. She believed it was the tenderness of conscience, the tenderness of heart, which could not bear to feel itself guilty of the ingratitude imputed to her. But she was sore and wounded, not knowing how to bear it, fighting blindly against what it was more and more evident must be the will of God and her fate.

"Ailie!" said Mr. Lothian, looking at her with kind fatherly eyes. It was true he was Isabel's lover, strange even to himself as such a position was; but in presence

of every other woman in the world, he was a
growing old, a man calm and sobered, fully sens
of his age. "Ailie, I have come to ask for you, the
it is long since I have seen you of your own will.
have higher pretensions now-a-days; but still you
me of my flock——"

Ailie lifted upon him her lucid, visionary
which were full of a certain despair. "Oh, ay,
ay!" she said; "I'm but one of the flock. I tho
had the Spirit of the Lord. But the oracle's d
and the books are closed. Oh, minister, you're
man of light, but I think in your heart you're a
of God. If you were required to walk in a new
and had nae instruction given to your ain soul,
would ye do,—what would ye do?"

Mr. Lothian was brought to a stand-still by
eagerness in her eyes, and the pathos in her v
He was in earnest, it is true, in wishing her well,
yet in pursuing his own religious way. But he
not in such deadly earnest as this. It was not a m
of life and death to him to come to a certain conclu
on any one point that remained to be considered in
And in the calm of his age he could scarcely un
stand the young creature's passionate eagerness.
faltered a little in his answer. "Ailie," he said
any other man of his years would have done, "I w
consider which was best."

Ailie, who had been gazing wistfully at him,
with some new hope, turned away her head sudde
throwing up her hands with an expression of des
"The best!" she cried; "God's way is aefold, and
many. His will is one, and has to be done. Oh
that think ye can shift and dally to please Him

way or that way. Am I asking which is best? Can ye no wake out of your sloth and open the eyes of your spirit and tell me what's the will of God?"

She had expected no answer, and indeed turned from him leaning her head against the portal of the humble door. But the minister felt himself called upon to speak.

"Nature is God's servant as well as you and me," he said, "and Nature is speaking against this, Ailie,—speaking loud. Whatsoever leads ye from your natural duties and affection, you may be sure is not the will of God."

Ailie raised her head and looked at him, wondering beyond expression to find herself so admonished. "I've nae duties but to follow God's will," she said, "to follow Him to the end of the earth. Oh, if I could but open the way of the Lord to you and the like of you. Nature's but a poor handmaid of His grace, no a mistress nor a guide. Oh, man, with your grey head, that should ken what God's service is, how can you speak of nature to me?"

"And what if it were that you wanted to conside above all else?" said the minister, laying his kind hand on her shoulder. Ailie put him aside without a word. A little shudder seemed to run through her at his touch. If it was her ecstasy that was coming upon her, or if it was merely a movement of the nature which she defied, Mr. Lothian could not tell; but she passed him thus, taking no further notice, and glided across the road like a ghost to the heathery braes which stretched away into the distance.

"As if it were but an every-day," said her mother who appeared in the passage behind, ready to pour out

a flood of troubles into the minister's ear. The Sabbath-day was a more rigorous institution in Scotland then than now, and the inhabitants of the surrounding cottages, most of whom would have considered a Sunday walk, which was not a work of necessity, to be something like a crime, looked on perturbed, and not knowing what to make of it, when Ailie, thus driven by the intensity of her feelings, sought solitude and counsel on the hill.

"There's Ailie away across the braes," cried a weary young prisoner in one of the neighbours' houses. "It canna be a sin. Oh, let me go too!"

"Are ye a prophet of the Lord like Ailie?" said the mother with fierce contempt. The Holy Maid was above those laws which weighed so rigorously upon "common folk."

CHAPTER XXIII.

AILIE went forth, not to seek counsel of flesh and blood, but to lay, as she would have said, her "burden before the Lord." Her eyes were bent upon the ground, for her heart was heavy; her mind was full of a wandering chaos of thoughts, through which she sought in vain for anything which she could take as an indication of the will of God. It was thus she expressed it, and thus she meant in all honesty. Ailie was subject, like all enthusiasts, to take the suggestions of her own heart, veiled by a natural unconscious subtility of expression, for the revelation of Heaven; but she was ignorant of that wonderful process which goes on in *every self-absorbed and self-studying* intelligence. Her

own being was not to her a complicated piece of i
lectual machinery set in motion by every passing t
or breath, but a hallowed, silent, receptive place, w
God's voice was heard, where whispers came
above, and by turns in anguish from beneath, w
echoed to celestial tones, and was conscious of e
passing spiritual influence. "O Lord, I'm emptie
myself. O dear Lord, my chambers are swept
garnished that Thou mightest come in and dwell.
it my will I want or my way? I am dumb; I
not; I speak not. Speak Thou, for Thy servant hear
These were the words that fell from her lips as
strayed among the rustling, faded heather which
wind had dried and crisped. With a faith unfei
she believed what she said. Her heart had risei
against Mr. John's first intimation of what was tc
with a wild tumult of resistance. But now she
succeeded in calming herself. The storm had
down, but trouble, and doubt, and disquietude,
taken its place. Ailie was a Puritan born, and k
nothing of Rome and her ways but as the Sc
Woman or the Man of Sin. But Nature, which is
stronger than creed or doctrine, had impressed or
mind of the Scotch country girl the sentiments pr
to a Pucelle of the olden faith. She believed in
self, a simple maid, burdened and honoured with C
message to the world. She believed in her powe
traverse that unknown world from end to end, gua
by her purity and His holy angels. Fear was no
in her mind than in that of Jeanne of Arc. Her
sion was even higher. She had to restore not a l
but the defaced image of God in the hearts of m
to call back not her people to national existence,

humankind to the recollection of the Saviour. She did not even ask herself why to her, a simple girl, such a mission should have been confided. She accepted it with the Pucelle's unhesitating, simple faith, with the Pucelle's dauntless, visionary valour. Her utter weakness, ignorance, unsuitability for such an enterprise, were to Ailie as, no doubt they were to Jeanne, the very reasons,—God's reasons, ineffably above all the ideas of man—why she should take it up. A creature specially dedicated to Him, belonging to Him, one of those who walk in white with the Lamb, the natural flower and blossom of humankind; such Ailie felt herself to be without either vanity or doubt. Vanity had nothing to do with such a solemn question. To consider the simple beauty which belonged to her state and age as any subject of self-satisfaction would have been but the victim's pleasure in the garland that wreathed its doomed neck. Ailie had no leisure for such a thought—but her maidenhood was her white garment of ministration, her natural qualification for her work.

When her ear had first been struck by Mr. John's extraordinary proposal, her entire soul and nature rose up in revolt. As a wife it seemed to Ailie that she would have no mission, that she would no longer be God's directly appointed servant, that she would care no longer where she went or what became of her. All the dreams which she believed to be prophetic visions failed from her mind. She no longer saw the visionary multitudes receiving her message, nor herself in a mysterious elation discoursing to them, in words which she could not understand, but which they did, the wonderful works of God. Her future became a blank before *her, her inspiration* vanished. For more than a

fortnight no tongue had come from Ailie's lips. She was humiliated, disappointed, cast down. The crown was taken from her head. A man's wife! No theory of any kind respecting wives or maidens had ever crossed her mind, but yet she felt instinctively that her work would be changed, that her dreams would be over. If God wanted such a sacrifice she was ready to give herself up like Isaac to be bound for the immolation; but was it a lying spirit to which her own gave no response, a temptation sent to try her; or was it the will of God?

The braes lay lonely under the faint occasional glimpses of a watery sun. It was Sabbath all over the silent country; something exceptionally still marked the exceptional day. The little steamer that fumed and fretted up the Loch every afternoon about this hour was of course invisible, and so were the boats which for use or pleasure dotted the water on week-days, and added one characteristic sound to the usual noises. The people going home from church had all disappeared. Nothing moved except the blue smoke from the cottage-roofs, and sometimes a shy rabbit or invisible wild creature among the high heather. And yet by-and-bye even Ailie, absorbed as she was, became aware that she was not the only wanderer on the hill-side. Under the birch-tree, some one sat crouched together, whose heart was full, like her own, of many thoughts. There was but one creature on the Loch who was likely to seek such a hermitage. Perhaps had Ailie's thoughts been at their usual strain she would never have remarked her companion; but earthly things had come *in to* confuse the current of her imagination; and a *certain* sense of companionship, and even of possible

help, came to her. "She's but a simple thing," her first idea, and then, "She's Margret's sister," young enthusiast added to herself. Ah, blessed garet! maiden Margaret! whom Ailie had strive keep out of that quiet, sheltering grave and to d to all those cares of life which for the first time now come upon herself. She drew close to Marg sister with a faint throb of expectation. "Am judge whence the word may come?" she said to self. "Is it not out of the mouths of babes and lings that He perfects praise?"

Isabel had not yet made her appearance at c to her stepmother's infinite distress, though it wa of the unalterable etiquettes of rural life "after a d The wilful girl had declared with tears that she not bear it. "With everybody looking, and loo and all the folk going past, that used to stop and How is she? It would break my heart," said I And she had stolen out to the braes when Jear the children returned from church, feeling the s a consolation to her. Now that *he* was gone the were changed, the romance had gone from them quivering of possibility, that sense that he might at any moment which had made this stretch of he enchanted ground to Isabel. Now he was gone. not he, but his very image, was gone from the of which he had been the charm. Poor Isabel's was very sore; he had wounded her in a way perhaps she might have forgiven had he been her which she could not forgive while the arrow of hi posed contempt and disrespect quivered in her "He might have left me with some comfort," she th "I would have parted with him and never said a

I would have waited twenty years. He should have had my heart and my thoughts. But all he had was a light word for me." This had subdued her beyond all her other griefs. That subtle sting of disrespect, of light estimation, and half-contempt, had gone through all the defences Isabel could protect herself with. Had he ceased loving her, perhaps even that might have been endured; but to love and to hold her so light—It was this that went to her heart.

At that moment she was more absorbed in her thoughts than Ailie, being hopeless and expecting no consolation or deliverance; and when the rustle of the heather caught her ear, and looking up she saw Ailie's slender figure standing over her, a movement of impatience woke in Isabel's mind. Nobody could give her any comfort, could they not then leave her alone? It was all she asked. To be left to brood over the ending of her early, lonely life and all her dreams. This was all that now remained to her. To others, life renewed itself, changed its fashions, put forth new blossoms, extended, full of light and hope, into the future; but hers was over. Could they not have the charity to leave her at least alone?

"Is it you, Isabel?" said Ailie, coming to her side.

"Ay, it's me. I thought I was sure to be alone here. Do you take your walks all the same on the Sabbath-day?"

"To me a' days are the same," said Ailie. "If I ken mysel I have nae desire but to be aye doing my Master's business. Sabbath or every day, I make no difference. And the silence is fine, and the air sweet to-day, like every day."

"It is not silence now," said Isabel, with the fitful,

temper for which, as soon as the words were
she was sorry and penitent.

No," said Ailie, from whom the great perplexity
as in had taken much of her solemn aspect. "It's
nce now, and whiles there are better things than
e. Isabel, when I saw ye among the heather, I
at the Lord sent ye to give me an answer in my
le. It's like drawing the lot; and I've done that
nd o'er by myself, and I canna see it. But you
innocent, and ken nothing about him or me. I'll
the lot at you, Isabel. I'm no saying it to make
in. It's because you're young, and soft, and no
d in the ways of this world, but like a little bairn
," said the young prophetess, kneeling down
ly at her side, and gazing into her face with
visionary eyes which were wild in their pathos.
to do what he bids, or no?"

e question raised Isabel out of her personal brood-
She was startled—almost frightened by the
ence of the appeal. "Oh! how can I tell you,
at do you want me to say?" she said, clasping
ands; and then she remembered what she had
about Ailie and Mr. John, and shrank at the
t of the responsibility thus placed in her hands.
Tell me ay or no," said Ailie, gazing so into her
into her eyes, that Isabel's very soul was moved.
ore the look as long as she could, and then she
d her face with her hands.

Your eyes go through and through me," she said,
I cannot judge for you. I am not like her that
e. I am but Isabel. I cannot guide myself. And
at have more light than all the rest—how should
you?"

"I am giving no reasons," said Ailie, "it's no time for reasons. It's out of the mouth of babes a sucklings—Isabel, say ay or no?"

"Then I'll say ay," said Isabel, suddenly liftir her head with a gleam of her old impatience. It w far from being spoken like an oracle of God. It w uttered hastily, with a certain nervous distaste to beir thus questioned. But when she saw the effect her wor produced, her heart failed her. Ailie sank down hel lessly on the road. She did not faint, as Isabel, bein somewhat pre-occupied by her own first experience bodily weakness, thought. She sank down in a he without making an effort or a struggle. Every tint colour fled from her face. Her eyes, which alo seemed to have any life left in them, were raised wi a look of such reproach as made her hasty advis tremble. But Ailie did not say a word. She lay wit the air of one stunned and helpless among the heathe Then after the first minute a sob came from her lip Isabel was overcome by her own fears.

"Oh, Ailie!" she cried, "I meant nothing. Wh should you put such weight on what I say? I w impatient, and I said the first word that came to m I did not mean it. I meant No instead. Oh, Aili will you listen now to what I say?"

"When I'm come to myself," said Ailie, wavin her hand. Her voice was so low as scarcely to l audible. Then her pale lips moved, though no sou came from them at first; and her eyes turned upwa with such an expression of submission and pain, Isabel had never seen. "No my will," Ailie murmure with her hands holding her breast, "no my will, b Thine." It was a voice as of despair, when a lit

thrill of renewed vigour made it audible. Awe stole over her companion, whose careless words had done it. Isabel, in her self-reproach, rose up from her seat in haste. She took off the shawl in which she was wrapped, and kneeling down beside Ailie endeavoured to place it under her. She put her arms round her with a remorse that made an end of pride. "Oh, Ailie, I meant nothing! It was my hasty way," she cried, bending over her, kissing her even in her eagerness. Ailie did not resist the soft caress. She laid her head down upon Isabel's shoulder, and closed her eyes, which were strained and painful with so much emotion. "My soul is poured out as water—my strength hath He weakened in the way," she said, leaning back with closed eyes. The struggle was over. She had resisted long; but in this fantastic way at last she had satisfied herself, and would struggle no more.

And thus the soft air breathed on them, and the still moments passed over those two young creatures, clinging to each other among the silence of the hills, with the sorest ache in their hearts which each had ever known. Isabel in her fright had almost forgotten hers. She sat embracing Ailie who leant upon her, and wondering what it was which had moved the girl so strangely to the exclusion of her own thoughts, which had been bitter enough. Once before Isabel had spoken in her haste, and her voice had been taken for an oracle of God. She had never forgotten the awful sense that, had she but held out and struggled against utterance, Margaret's life might have been spared; she had given way to her feelings then and again now; and what was it that she had done this time?—something *which she had never anticipated* and did not yet

what I must do, I will do, to the full

"But, O Allie! you'll never do
do it, if you don't love him!" said

She shrunk and hesitated to s
seemed to her a kind of blasphemy.

"Could I have said it to Margaret?" she a herself. And was not Ailie, too, like Margaret, a nted virgin, above such suggestions of this cor earth?

"Oh, whisht!" said Ailie, with a wild, sudden of colour flaming over her face. "Whatever the L will may be, I am His handmaid to do it. But, ow I'm punished now! I wouldna let your Mar a. I would bid her back to earth when she w aven's door—no thinking what was waiting for lf. Though I'm no murmuring against the Lor

And then there was a moment of silence, o e side full of eager revolt and determination t e; on the other of that stunned submission w mes after a great blow.

"Oh, no—no! it cannot be," cried Isabel, clas her arms the girl for whom, up to this moment, d felt so little sympathy. "I will never believe God's meaning. If you did not love him you w ate him. How could you help it? It cannot b must not be!"

"Whisht—whisht!" said Ailie, with a faint entary smile, "you're aye so earnest. Oh, i would come with us, Isabel, for *her* sake, and yourself on the Lord's side. Whisht!—What's G doing can never harm His servants. I'm no rebel now, that's a' past. The worst is I canna see work, nor what remains for me in this world," added, with a piteous gentleness, "for the spir prophecy is ta'en from me as would be fit, when under another, and no free in my ain power. Maybe, it's my een that are blinded," she said, put her hand up to them with a close pressure, as if

ached. But it was not because they ached. It was because they were full to overflowing with a stinging salt moisture. She would not yield to that common mode of relief. "Why should I greet when the Lord's will is manifest?" she said, all at once. "It would more suit me to greet if I knew not what that was."

"But it cannot be God's will, and you so sore,—sore against it," cried eager Isabel, "in your heart."

"I'm no such a rebel," cried Ailie, with a start. "Oh, I'm no so ill as you think—me that am set to be a sign to His people. Now it's all past," she added, raising herself up. "And, Isabel, though you dinna understand, you've been real good to me, and I'll never forget it. Oh, will ye no come and open your heart now to the Lord, as long as the day of visitation lasts? I canna bide to think that Margret's sister should be on the world's side, and no on the Lord's."

"I never was on the world's side," said Isabel, with something of her natural impatience, rising, as Ailie did so, to her feet.

"He that is not with us is against us," said the young prophetess. "O Isabel! Dinna trust in the good that's just nature. The day is near past—the night is at hand. And you thinking of love, and pleasure, and the delights of this life, and no of that awfu' day."

"Delights!" said Isabel, holding up the heavy crape on her dress to the intent eye which remarked no such homely particulars; and then she turned hastily and went away—partly irritated, partly weary. She had forgotten her own burden to minister to the other. And she had need of consolation and encouragement herself, not of weariness and excitement. She turned,

as was her hasty way, and left the visionary crea
tanding behind her on the hill. Ailie stood and ga
after the rapid, retreating figure, not offended as i
different region of society she might have been. T
parting *sans façon* was not extraordinary among
omely country folk. She stood and looked after
with a wistful interest, stronger than any human se
ent which perhaps had ever before crossed her m
A girl free to live her natural life, free to make
atural choice, bound by no mysterious rules, prepa
o no awful office as God's ambassador to man—

Her appearance filled Ailie with a certain softe
avy, a wondering desire to penetrate the future
ense of contrast which weighed her down. A vi
assed before her eyes, of Isabel's lot and her o
The one, smiling, simple, full of love and light, am
er own people; the other, overcast with clouds,
nother path through the unknown. A throb of p
ent through her heart. Ailie had never dreamed
girls dream, of what might be waiting her in the fut
Romance with her had been religious vision
ecstasy. No fairy prince had ever moved her fa
She was of the nature of those predestined mys
pon whom earthly love has no power. But nov
udden change had come across her destiny. A n
ad stepped into it, in a pale horror, blanching
ery sense of life out of her heart. Marriage wa
ome to her, not as by nature ordained, but arbitrar
er own will having no share in it. And, for the
me, a wistful envy of Isabel, and of the natural
me over her mind. She, too, was to bow her n
that same yoke, but not with sweet reluctance, w
nder consent, like Isabel—only in a passion of s

mission and painful acquiescence in the will of God. And as the contrast struck her, the peaceful path which lay before Isabel shone sweet before those visionary eyes.

"Aye peace, aye love, aye consolation; kind faces to smile on her, bairns to hang by her. And me——!" cried Ailie, with one last sob of self-pity. Then she, too, turned, and left the birch-tree among the heather, the scene of so many dreams.

There was a meeting the same night. Ailie shut herself up for all the afternoon of this memorable day. She went into the little room, at the window of which, in the middle of the night, Mr. John's extraordinary proposal had been first made to her, and placed her open Bible on her bed, and knelt down before it. There she remained, fasting, in one long trance of prayer and reverie, while the short autumn day came to an end, and the twilight closed round her. Had her fate been to go to the stake on the morrow, her preparation for it would have been triumphant in comparison. But the stake could not have been a more supreme proof of her devotion to the service of God than was this act of submission to what she believed His will. Martyrdom would have been a glorious sacrifice worthy of all her powers; while this was miserable, humiliating, a shock to her whole nature,—a clog, as she thought, upon her work,—a moral annihilation. Poor Ailie bowed her head upon her Bible, that even herself might not see the tears that came in a flood to her still girlish eyes. She had received as a brother prophet the man whom she was now about to accept as the companion of her life—who was she that she should refuse whom the Lord had called?—

but a certain horror of him, of any approach t
even of the voice of his prophesying too close
ear, had been the prevailing sensation in Ailie'
in respect to Mr. John. Was it a "judgment"
for her want of charity? Had God noted, as H
said to note, the point at which she was most susce
and struck her with His awful arrow in that
These, and a hundred other thoughts, passed t
Ailie's mind, while she lay, as it were, crush
bleeding, at the footstool of her Master, wh
wounded her. But there was no longer a thou
resistance in her mind. The future was very
before her, and life, under so changed a form,
tery which she could not comprehend. But yet
come, however awful the anticipation. She ac
the bitter cup from God's hand, and made no
struggle against her fate.

When the hour for the meeting came, Ailie w
herself in her plaid and went out alone down th
road. Her mother was in weak health, and, wi
strange diversity which is so often met with
was a homely, sober woman, who thought ther
"far ower mony meetings," and was more scan
than flattered by the prominent position taken
daughter in them. There was a little controve
tween them before Ailie went out, over a cup
which the anxious mother importuned her child t
"O Ailie! do you mean to break my heart and
yourself?" she said. "Neither bit nor sup has
your lips since morning. You've been ower nigh
to be that careless of your health—if it were
your puir auld faither's sake, that canna bear
of his night."

"I couldna swallow it," said Ailie; "and he'll have to bear the want of me. I must forsake father and mother for the work of the Lord."

"Oh, lassie, ye make my heart sick," said the mother: "as if the Lord couldna do His ain work without the help of a bit lass like you."

But Janet's mind did not dwell on the words. Such words were usual enough in the highflown, religious phraseology of the moment, and the "work of the Lord" might mean no more than a series of meetings, or retirements to her room for prayer. Neither was the mother alarmed by Mr. John's proposal. It was "an awfu' compliment;" but in her heart she felt that even a special revelation could not make such a *mésalliance* possible; and that rather than suffer such an extraordinary downfall, the aristocracy of the clan Diarmid would procure some powerful remonstrance with Heaven itself against such a removal of all natural boundaries. "Na, na, Miss Catherine will never allow it," she had said when she heard; though a thrill of natural pride went through her. "If she would take a little pains with herself, and put up her hair like the rest, our Ailie is a bonnie lass," the mother had added to herself, not without complacency, "But, na, na, it couldna be."

And Ailie made no intimation of what she was about to do. She had not taken counsel with flesh and blood. It was not a matter with which father or mother could interfere. God had spoken, and must be obeyed. She went down alone wrapped in her plaid —wrapped in an abstraction that kept the other passengers on the way at a distance. At all times it was her habit to go and come alone; but on this par-

ticular night some shade of special self-absorption was noted by the quick eyes of the crowd. "Is it *that* she's thinking of?" said one, falling back behind the shrouded, slender figure, which passed among them like a ghost. "Poor thing! her heart gangs another gait, or I'm sair mista'en." "Set her up!" cried a second, with indignation, "auld John Macfarlane's daughter. I would like to ken what she would have." "Eh! I wouldna take that awfu' man for all the world," said a younger critic; while another added with authority, "Ye'll see it'll all be settled to-night."

Such were the comments with which the people of Loch Diarmid went to their prayer-meeting. Religious excitement had risen to the highest pitch among them. It had produced many actual and tangible results, changes of feeling and conduct and life. To many it had been the very turning-point of existence. But yet they were not able to dismiss from their minds that interest in human affairs which holds its place through all higher excitements. They were on their way to the little assembly in which many of them expected to hear what they considered direct revelations from Heaven;—but yet they paused by instinct to scrutinize the heroine of this little drama—the story, so different from other stories, which was being played out, as on a stage, before their eyes.

The meeting was to be held that night on the south side of the Loch, in a barn reluctantly granted by Mr. Smeaton for the accommodation of the prophets. Before entering it, Ailie went into the cottage of the shepherd who lived close at hand. There she found Mr. John seated by the fire, along with several leaders of *the movement*. *There* was no other light in the

room, and he sat with his dark head, relieved against the blaze, leaning on his hands. The others were talking around him, arranging their little services, exchanging experiences; but Mr. John sat silent and took no part among them. Ailie went up to him, penetrating through the group. She held out her hand to him, standing before the fire.

"It shall be as you say," she said with a voice which almost failed her at the last.

Mr. John turned round and gazed up at her for a moment, the ruddy light shining in his face, as it did in hers. He was dark and haggard in that illumination, she very pale, and with a look of exhaustion on her face. He took her hand and held it for a moment, and then he let it drop out of his.

"You acknowledge the word of the Lord, at last?" he said, almost with severity. And then he sprang up and interposed in the order that was being arranged for the services, with a nervous hurriedness which struck her strangely. She had thought that, perhaps, he at least would be glad. But he was not glad. He rushed into the discussion which he had retired from with an unwonted eagerness. Thus Fate had caught them both in her net. And though Mr. John had set his heart on this thing, it filled him with such an acute pang now he had gained it, that only instant movement and occupation prevented him from betraying himself. But the meeting of that night was such an "outpouring" as few people present had ever known before. A feverish earnestness filled them, born of the very excess of pain.

"Eh, but Ailie was awfu' grand to-night," the people said. "Eh, if you had but heard Mr. John!"

hey were both in a half-craze of misery, speaking ke people in a dream. And thus, as the assembly oresaw, everything was settled that night.

CHAPTER XXIV.

After this there was a certain lull in the course of life, as happens so often after a crisis full of events. Ailie went home alone, as ever, to her father's cottage, consoling herself as best she could, rather trying to forget herself in the flood and hurry of spiritual excitement. She had spoken much and long, with such fervour that all who heard her were moved by it, of the Second Coming and all its wonderful results. Was it not the moment when all that was wrong would be set right, and all the misery and confusion of this world turned once more into harmony? With that discord in her own heart which closed her ears even to Heaven's music, Ailie's mind betook itself piteously to the great deliverance which seemed approaching so near. He was coming again,—He whose advent had been the beginning of all mercy and kindness and ender consolation to the hapless race of man; He the irst who had ever taught that mercy and meekness, ot splendour or wisdom or pride, were the highest iings on earth;—He whose ear was never shut to any etitioner. With her own heart beating and yearning ie had set this picture before the eyes that followed ery glanee of her inspired eyes, every movement of ir eloquent lips,—"Oh, friends! your hearts may be re, your lives a' out of tune, but He is coming that ll *set it all right,*" *she had* cried, with moanings of

those unknown voices, the cries that were unspeakable, mingled with her intelligible speech. On that night she had regained the power which personal uncertainty had taken from her; the mist rolled off from the future and she saw clear. "I see Him coming; and a' the kingdoms of this world crumbling and falling!" she cried: "I see the great and the wicked that have oppressed His folk, crying to the hills to fall on them and the rocks to cover them. And I see you!" she had gone on, stretching out her slender hands, gazing with great lambent, visionary eyes into the hearts of her hearers. "Oh, come to His feet with me! Say, Lord, all's well, all's well, now Thou art here! What is trouble, or sorrow, or the outcries of the miserable, or the writhings of the wounded in heart, when He has come to heal all? Come, oh, come quickly! What is it but for this that all the creation groans and travails? Let Him but come and all will be well."

Her heart was still beating and her frame thrilling with the excitement of her own words, when all was silent again, and she was wending her way, once more in a dream, up the dark road, clothed with darkling groups of whispering figures, to her home. Ailie's heart quivered and palpitated, and yet there was in it a dead calm as of death. Her personal feelings had got the better of her devotion, and under shadow of the darkness which seemed to wrap her round and cover her, Ailie began once more to question the future; —deliverance from every trouble,—harmony to every discord. Ah, yes! But would there be any consolation for *her* even in such a joy of the whole earth? She reflected in her own heart that Mr. John was a servant *of the* Lord; that it was God's will she should give

herself to him; that they would be made one, th
she shuddered at the thought. What comfort,
could even His appearance bring to *her?* What
she possibly hope for? He would not dissolve the
which He had made—He would not put them asu
having put them together. For all other troubles
might be help and relief from every misery. But
Diarmid's wife, who could deliver? Not even
God would respect His own law, let heaven and
pass away. He could free from sickness; but
Ailie would have received back her sickness, that
killing her, with eager arms. He could oper
prison gates, he could make the tongues of the
to sing; but, oh! would He, could He, send help
man's wife? Never, so long as the heavens an
earth should stand fast. How could she so muc
tell God?—how could she lay open her heart and
Him the pangs of resistance that were in it? Ev
heaven that awful bond which made one h
creature the possession of another would hold
There would be no escape in death; none in the
world.

Not the extremest Catholic would have held
extreme views on this subject than did the S
country girl, nourished in the belief that marriage
the one unalterable, eternal union. She had give
word and was as if she were already his wife; a
was for ever and ever. What could even the co
of the Lord do for her? With these sombre tho
she contended as she threaded the darkling g
home alone, and went in the midst of the crowd.
eyes were caught, as she passed the churchyard, s
now,—she could not tell how,—by the gleamin

one white stone—the stone, she felt instinctively, on Margaret Diarmid's grave. If the angels could mock, it might be some white vision tantalising her, bidding her mark the peaceful rest of that sister in Christ whom she had done her best to detain. But it could not be an angel that mocked her in her woe. Oh, could she but lift the stony cover, and draw aside the soft, chill sod, and creep in by Margaret's side!—Could not God carry on His own work without the help of a simple lass? She hurried on, feeling as if the ceaseless round of this long argument with herself, in which one thought kept surging up above another, would make her mad. Had she not put force upon herself, her feet would have carried her to Margaret's grave. It was better to take refuge in her own room instead, with her face hidden in her Bible, and her praises turned into such prayers as were possible. And thus eventually she fell asleep on her knees, and was found by the anxious, homely mother, who took her in her arms and placed her in bed as if she had been a child again. Such was the end of the struggle for Ailie; next morning she was composed and steadfast to carry out her sacrifice.

It was an event of which the country-side remained incredulous, until the very last moment. The strange pair were "cried" in church, both being present when the banns were proclaimed, in defiance of all superstition; but still no one believed it could be. Ailie sat passive in her seat while her name was read out, not a passing flicker of colour, not an indication of embarrassment being visible about her. She was very pale, and had been so, as all the world remarked, for some time before; and this public announcement of

t was about to happen produced no visible effe
n her. Neither did Mr. John visit her as a lov
ild. Sometimes they would be seen absorbed i
versation, both pale, holding apart from each othe
the evening of the day on which the banns wer
claimed, there was another meeting; and both brid
bridegroom announced "in power" that the day
ation was almost over, and that before anoth
k had past, they should have gone forth to carr
word to the Gentiles. "We go, not knowin
ther we go," Ailie had cried; "and ye for who
have laboured, will ye bide for ever in the gall
dity? Oh, give us your souls to be the first-frui
ur mission. Give us joy in this awful momen
en we leave our ain land and our father's hous
he light go with us of your salvation." Those wh
her that night never forgot her. She was ha
ne with inspiration and despair. Over her fac
ch was no longer pale, but marble white, the
ibled a chill reflection, as of some intense, colou
, devouring flame. Her dress was black, "a
ome dress for a bride," as the women said with
dder. And as she lifted her arms and stood leanin
r them, like an angel of doom, her soft, music
e raised to its highest pitch, her visionary ey
ing into the air as if they saw something unseen
common crowd, a thrill of excitement ran throug
assembly. It was the look of a martyr approac
the moment of sacrifice—except indeed that
tyr would have been triumphant, flushed with cele
joy and elevation, not devoured with that pa
air and shame.

And to the amazement of the parish, no attempt

interference was made. Miss Catherine sat still within her ancestral palace, the homely mansion-house of Lochhead, like an offended queen. She absented herself from church on the Sunday of the banns, and was not seen of human eye unfil all was completed; but she made no attempt to interfere. Neither did Mr. Diarmid of Clynder on the other side of the hills, Mr. John's uncle. The opposition which everybody had expected never made itself visible. It is true that Mrs. Blythwood and Miss Isabella Diarmid, two of the bridegroom's aunts, paid him a sudden and brief visit at Ardnamore without any warning given of their intention to the household. But the parish, though all its ears and eyes were intent to glean what information was possible, could make nothing of this event. "Ae thing is certain," said Jenny Spence at the head of a female parliament on the subject, "that Miss Bell and Mrs. Blythwood never gaed near Ailie—though a's settled so far as I can hear, and she's to be married the morn."

"Na, that would be too much," said another gossip. "The like of Miss Bell visiting at John Macfarlane's house!" "Ye gang far and far enough in thae Radical times, but no just so far as that."

"I canna see why if she's to be Mrs. John the morn——"

"And Leddy of Ardnamore—set her up! Eh, didna I aye tell ye, all thae prayings and preachings wouk come to nae good end?"

"It depends on what ye ca' a good end," said Mary White from the mill: "would it be better if John Diarmid was roamin' wild about the country, and no a lass nor a house safe from his evil thoughts? If you

harts werena hard as the nether mill-stone, ye w
hank God for His wonderful grace. Here's a
hat was a public scandal in the parish, drinking
esting and chambering and wantoning. And
e's clothed, and in his right mind, as great a s
he was ance a sinner. And instead of marryin
e to please himself, isna it the Lord's voice the
ith following that bids them wed and go forth
e salvation of the world? Oh, ye're aye ready,
dy to find fault! But when there's a grand ex
e o' grace like this, no a word o' praise to God
find in any person's mouth."

"Eh, I wouldna like if my man had asked me
reason but to please himself," cried a young
would rather jump into the Loch if I was A
hat's what makes her look so pale."

"Whisht, ye silly thing! are you to be exam
ur man and you, that are little better than
irns?"

"But she's no that far wrang;" said Jenny Spe
Our John and me have been married this tw
ar, and nae doubt he thought I would make hi
od wife; but he wasna the fool to say it was
hen he came courting. 'I love you!—I love y
s a' his sang. And so it's natural it should be.'

"Among carnal folk," said Mary, standing
ound. "But is this a time to waste in courting
ity when the Lord's at the door? You and y
e and your nonsense, filling young folk's heads
lly! But when He comes with His saints, will
think of his lass, or the wife of her man? It
Ailie's joy to think she's done the will o' the I
that day."

These words silenced a little the group of women who had almost all been "impressed," as it was common to say, and gone to the meetings—and given at least a certain portion of their belief to the prophets and their work.

"I canna allow, a' the same, but what there should be something mair than that between married folk;" said Jenny Spence, whose superior connexions made her bold. "If a lass canna like a man, how is she to thole him by her side for ever and ever? Losh, I'm no an ill wife mysel,—but a man about your hands early and late—aye there, if ye're ill or well—that ye canna send ben the house out of your gait—that'll no let ye be—If you havena a feeling for him by the ordinary, how are ye ever to put up with him? That's what I aye say."

"Eh, woman, mony a time it takes an awfu' strong feeling!" exclaimed a bystander, with a little grimace; but the village parliament took the utterance *cum grano*, knowing there were difficulties in her house.

"You shouldna talk like that with young lasses about," said Jean Campbell, who had lately joined the group. "I've come up the road with our Isabel. I canna tell what she has to do with it. But she's gane to see Ailie, aye saying, 'She maunna do it!—she maunna do it!' Our Isabel is no a lass that likes to make or meddle—but when she puts to her hand——"

"I never saw a woman so infatuated as you about thae two," said Mary. "They're no princesses after a', but only Duncan Diarmid's bairns."

"The Captain's daughters were baith ladies born," said their stepmother, proudly, "as a' the Loch kens; and if I'm infatuate, as ye say, wha should ken them

a weel? But I wasna speaking to Mary White,
inks it her duty to put a' the world out of cor
ith each other. If our Isabel doesna change Ai
ind naebody will."

"It's too late now," said Jenny Spence; "the
be married the morn."

"And auld Janet Macfarlane's no the woman tc
ah a grand match go by," said one. "And ma
illie's no so simple as folk think," added anot
There never was such a thing kent on the Locl
at a simple lass out of a cothouse should be Le
Ardnamore."

At the smithy the same exciting subject was
ssed in a different tone. It was equally amazin
ohn Macwhirter and his gossips. But naturally t
nsidered it from a different point of view. Perl
was less easy for the men to conceive of any
hange of character in a man who had, for evil
r good, made so much commotion in the parish;
e matter was simple enough from their point of v
illie was "a bonnie lass," and she was above tem
en—unattainable except in one way; and Mr. J
riven wild by one excitement on the top of anot
oved by the horror of Margaret's death, and perl
armed for his own salvation if he continued in
il ways, had been led to bid the highest price f
w gratification. This was the easy decision to w
e worthies of the smithy felt themselves drawn.

"And Janet Macfarlane's awfu' long-headed,"
e smith himself. "We're auld neighbours, and I
r ways. Put a grand chance like that in her
d she's no the woman to give it the go-bye.
uldna give much for Ailie herself in the wa
rldly wisdom. But she's a good lass, and wou

be led astray for a' the lairds in the Highlands; and whiles that answers just as well."

"I wonder how long they'll bide away," said Peter Chalmers, the general merchant. "You'll see it'll turn out a wedding-jaunt this grand journey; they'll gang to France, or Eetaly, or some of thae places. But they'll find the tongues no generally applicable; and they'll mind that Ardnamore's a pleasant dwelling, and they'll be hame again before the swallows. Ye'll see if I'm right or no when the time comes."

"I'll no say if you're right or wrang, but you're a nasty body," said old Sandy Diarmid, who as usual was waiting for his cart to be mended, "and believe in naething nor naebody. I'm no that fond o' John Diarmid, but he's in earnest *now*. For the woman I canna say—a man's aye at a loss to ken."

"He's never at nae loss," said John Macwhirter. "Set them down offhand wi' an ill motive, and ye're aye right, according to Peter. He's nae judge o' human nature. Bad's the best, if you'll trust him; he canna see the distinction atween ill and waur; there's nae real philosophy in him. And he's a nasty body, as you say."

"I ken human nature ower weel, ye mean," said Peter, unabashed; "and if ye were to look at it across a counter, or through my books frae year's end to year's end, ye would maybe change your mind. I'm saying no harm of Black John; he'll pay any price for a thing he's set his heart on, sooner than want it; and a bonnie missionary he'll mak'. I wish ye a' joy of him. With the like of him for preachers, ye'll soon see a converted world."

"I see nae reason against it," said Sandy, holding out his shrivelled old hands, as was his wont, towards

the fire. "He's in awfu' earnest, as any fool
see; and why he mightna be a changed charact
well as Paul or suchlike, I canna tell."

"Nane of the friends will interfere," said the
"I wouldna say but they might think it was th
chance for him—now the Captain's Margret is
and gone—if he were married and satisfied,
bonnie lass like Ailie to keep him right. An
partly of Peter's opinion, they'll no bide long
She'll like to have the full price she sells hers
She'll gie him little rest till he's back, and herse
in a' the country-side as Mrs. Diarmid and the
of Ardnamore. I canna blame her. If I were
myself in that way—though I would like to ke
would buy me!—I'd be keen to have my pric
get a' I bargained for. Poor Ailie! it's but a
bargain, as ye may see in her face."

"John Macwhirter," said the miller, who h
entered, "I'll have ye up before the kirk-session
speaking. Is that a way to talk of two persons
of the Lord? You should a' think shame—an
Sandy, an auld man—of putting in your word
ye canna understand. There was never seen so
a pair in a' the west country as thae two. T
chosen vessels, chosen for the Lord's service.
never joining in against Mr. John, Peter Ch
You that have good occasion to be grateful to th
o' Ardnamore."

"Me?" said Peter; "am I one to make or m
Na, na; let them gang their ain gait, and please
selves. I might say it wasna a suitable match
of the Ardnamore family—but more than that I
interfere."

"And that's too much," said Andrew. "

like a wheen wives about the doors—leaving your wark and abusing your friends. It's no flesh and blood that's the bond between these twa, but God's will and God's revelation; nor is it Ailie's view of what her work was to be. But the Lord will never put up with opinionated folk. What we like the least is what we've aye to do."

"I dinna haud with one of your views," said the undaunted smith, "and I'll argue ye out afore ony judges in the parish. Talk of a wheen wives about the doors! They're neither so narrow-minded nor so spiteful as Him ye call the Lord. Has He naething ado but watch the like of you, and see what you like and what you dinna like? I'll never believe that, if I were to live a hundred years."

"John Macwhirter," said the elder, sternly, "dinna blaspheme!"

"Blaspheme!" cried John. "Tak' tent to that yoursel. I'm saying I wouldna think as ill o' God as you do, no for half the world He's made. I'm no a ruling elder, nor a prophet, nor naething remarkable; but I have a respect for my Maker, if that's a'; and it's mair than you have. Na, na, Andrew: I'm no a man to be feared for the kirk-session. Speak you o' this marriage, if ye like, and gie us your views, like a' the rest of the world; but ye needna try to frighten me, for I'm no the kind of man."

"Which just shows the misery of a lukewarm minister," cried Andrew. "If he was as earnest as he should be, and withheld ordinances as he ought when there was need for it, ye wadna answer me back so free, and you a wean to christen! What should I say about the marriage? It's ane of the marriages made in heaven."

"Weel, I aye said he was in earnest now," sa
Sandy, subdued by the man of authority, who sto
his side.

"O, ay, he's in earnest," said the smith. "Aili
bonnie lass!"

"Ailie's the handmaid o' the Lord," said Andre
canna shut your smiddy, John Macwhirter; but
ll be well known in the parish—as well known
an make it—what you've said about these two t
; and it will do you little good."

"*That* for your ill or your good!" said Macwhirt
pping his fingers; "I'm no depending on you, Lo
praised! And," he added, loudly striking a resou
blow on his anvil, "Ailie's a bonnie lass—I say
in; and Mr. John, he's a fool, and will have
way. But what kind of content or happiness is
e of such a wedding is mair than I can tell."

"You're no the judge," said Andrew, drawing aw
rds the door.

"Nor you neither—a' the better for the lass," sa
n, exasperated; and then he showered such blo
on the red-hot iron that the sparks filled the smith
l the conference ended if not in smoke, yet with
dy glare and illumination—fire without and ang
hin.

Meanwhile Isabel, profoundly moved by her int
w with Ailie, and by all that had since occurr
l made up her mind to one final remonstrance
sacrifice should be accomplished. When she h
l to Jean, "I am going to see Ailie," the go
man's consternation had known no bounds. N
y was the condescension unparalleled, but it w
to be expected that Isabel, as a lady born, a
tled to the possession of feelings more delicate th

those of "common folk," should yet be able to pay an visits even among her equals. "Ailie!" she remon strated energetically; "and wha's Ailie, that you shoul gang to see her at such a time? She's no John Diar mid's wife yet; and if she was——"

"That is why I must see her," said Isabel. "She must never marry that man!"

Upon which Jean uttered the usual comment half in scorn and half in indignation. "Set her up! I would like to ken what right she has to ony such man."

"She does not want him," said Isabel. "She'll go and marry him and break her heart. Oh, I must go! If they were cried yesterday there is no time to lose."

"They're to be married the morn," said Jean. "And if that is what you have set your heart on, wait till I've gotten on my Sunday bonnet. I'll gang with ye myself."

"It is not necessary," said Isabel.

"Bell, my bonnie woman," said her stepmother, "I ken better what is needful than you do. It's no a moment to have you wandering on the road your lane."

And thus it was that Jean found herself in the midst of the village group, while Isabel penetrated into Ailie's cottage. The young prophetess was seated, silent, with a sombre fire in her eye, dejected yet excited, when Isabel was ushered in by her anxious mother. Janet had begun to take alarm about her daughter's aspect; but such an honour as the visit of the Captain's Isabel, no doubt paid to the prospective Mrs. Diarmid of Ardnamore, was a foreshadowing of greatness to come which went to her heart.

"Ailie, my woman!" she said. "Here's Isab
the Glebe. It's most kind of her to come and s
and I hope you'll let her see you think it kind.'

"Isabel!" said Ailie, dreamily; she was sitt
the side of her bed, pondering over her little
"Oh, ay, mother, I'm glad to see her; if she'l
ben."

"Let me speak to her alone," Isabel had
at the door; and the mother, half pleased y
doubtful, withdrew with wistful looks. If perh
mission of the mourner might be to reconcil
with the wonderful match she was making; a
again, a fanciful young girl might do her harm.

"I've come to speak to you before it is all
said Isabel. "O, Ailie, you mind what you
me? You are not happy. You are not looking
and yet they say you're to be married——"

"The morn," said Ailie, mechanically.

"To-morrow!" repeated Isabel, carefully c
her words, to be more impressive; "and yet y
not happy. Ailie, Ailie, it must not be!"

"What's God's will must be," she said; "h
neither here nor there;" and began again to tu
the leaves of the small Bible she held in her ha

"He is going to take you away," said
"where none of your friends perhaps will ever s
more; where you will be all alone with none b
and no love for him in your heart. Oh, Ailie,
you will hate him if ye cannot love him. I co
rest; I've been in no strange house till now *sinc*
I could not rest. Oh, Ailie, God would not ha
to be miserable; that can never be His will. Y
wiser than me, but you have aye been think
other folk, and not of what was in your own he

"Little but deceitfulness and wickedness," said Ailie, musing, "well I know; and a root of bitterness in the best. But, Isabel, there's no a word to say. It's no in my own hands. It was settled and ordained before you or me were born."

"And nothing will make you change your mind?"

"It's no my mind I'm speaking of," she said, with a half-despairing smile; "if it was me to decide! But whisht! whisht! and say no more; my mother is coming. I've had ill thoughts and thankless thoughts, and you've seen them, Isabel; but I'm the handmaid o' the Lord, and it's no to His glory to betray my weakness —no even to my mother."

"I'll not betray you," cried Isabel, with a little natural heat. Ailie turned wearily away, with a sigh of languor and heaviness; and just then her mother came bustling in, carrying a white muslin dress on her extended arms.

"It's no to call grand," said Janet, "but I thought you would like to see it. As for Ailie, she takes nae mair notice than if a wedding was a thing that happened every day."

"She's so full of her own thoughts," said Isabel, instinctively attempting an excuse.

"Thoughts are grand things," said Mrs. Macfarlane, "and our Ailie, as is weel kent, is a lass far out of the ordinar. But her wedding gown! A woman made out of stone would take an interest in that! I would be real thankful if you would put some real feeling in her mind."

"She has done her best," said Ailie, still bending absorbed over her book; "but I'm thinking of the Lord's will, and no of men's pleasure. My black gown that I wear every day is good enough for me."

"Hear to her!" said the mother; "but eh, I
you that's young yoursel, ye might tell her this
is nearer than heaven, and that we maun take
thought for the things of the flesh."

Ailie turned her head away. She turned her
upon them and resumed her reading, murmuring b
words to herself half aloud. The others stood g
at her as she sat, her drooping figure relieved ag
the pale light from the window, wrapt in that fe
absorption. "If He'll but stretch forth His arm
save," murmured Ailie; "if He'll but come quick
provided it's no a' in vain." Isabel's quick you
ear alone caught those faltering words. To the
ther, who was accustomed to her habits, they wer
"Ailie's way." Janet shook her head and wrun
hands as she looked at the condition of her child,
then she turned with natural relief to the wed
dress which she had spread out on two chairs.
beckoned Isabel to come and examine it, pinching
drawing out tenderly as she exhibited them the s
folds. "It's awfu' plain and simple," she said,
natural pride, in a half whisper, "but we're poor
If she had been to marry a neebor lad I would
got her a useful spotted muslin or a good print.
Mr. John, you see, he's a gentleman, and she'
lady of Ardnamore. And it's white for a bride
she can afford it. If it hadna been the word o
Lord, as she says, I canna think it would ever
been. And it's an awfu' heartbreak to see her
me notice, no even of her wedding gown."

"Do you think she's happy?" said Isabel,
ally, feeling the full misery of this indifference,
et bound by honour not to reveal what she kne
Ailie's mind.

"Happy!" echoed Janet, "with Ardnamore waiting to make a lady of her? What would she get better in this world? And I hope you'll no put nonsense in her head. It would just break my heart."

"I'll put no nonsense in her head," said Isabel. And then, surmounting her irritation, she added, "But oh, think if she were to be unhappy, and away in the world with nobody to comfort her."

The mother turned away with a little laugh. "Simple thing!" she said, under her breath, "you're like hersel; ye take it a' for gospel, every word they say."

"Are they not going away?" asked Isabel in amaze.

"Oh, ay, they're going away; but think ye the world's like Loch Diarmid, Isabel? They'll soon tire o' their preaching and their wandering among fremd folk. She's a' spirit and little flesh, my poor lamb. And her heart will fail her, and he'll be sick o't a', and syne they'll come cannily hame. And I'll see my bairn at kirk and market, with her bairns about her —no a common body like me," said Janet, wiping her eyes with her apron, "but leddy of Ardnamore."

"But she'll break her heart," said Isabel.

"I'm no feared for her heart," said the mother. "She's a loving thing, though you wouldna think it. Her heart will turn to her husband when she has nane but him."

This was Janet's programme of the strange romance. Isabel, though she was not used to contrasts of this description, went down the hill in a maze of reflections, wondering over the difference. Ailie's tragic purpose of going forth into the world to save it, her first step being upon her own heart, and all its maiden

opes; and her mother's frightful, sceptical, middle-ged prescience of the effects of weariness and failure —the inevitable disappointment, the sickening of heart, he giving up of hope, the despairing flight homeward o seek peace at least and quietness—stood before her ide by side like two pictures. Would the two en-thusiasts content themselves with common life and comfort after their high dreams, or was there after all, nothing in the dreams for which Ailie was making so awful a sacrifice? Isabel was too inexperienced to come to light on the subject; but Janet Macfarlane's cheerful unbelief struck her with mingled horror and pain. She did not ask herself whether all that was beautiful and wonderful in the hopes and beliefs of beginning life was thus looked upon by the calm eyes of the elders as so much delusion to be dispersed by the winds and storms. But that suggestion of in-security, unreality—and of the better-informed spectator, who realised and knew the downfall that was coming —appalled and terrified her. The sight of Mr. Lothian, who came out from the Mansegate as she passed, was, perhaps for the first time, a relief to Isabel. She was glad to have him come to her, to hear his sympathetic voice, to feel that there were people in the world who were not sceptical. "I have been seeing Ailie," she said, accounting half-apologetically for the little shiver of nervous excitement which she could not restrain.

"And now you'll come and see Miss Catherine," said Mr. Lothian. "You cannot help the one, but you can help the other, Isabel."

"Me help Miss Catherine? No, Mr. Lothian," said Isabel, with a little air of dignity. "She is never pleased, *whatever I do. She* would like me to pretend ' *be somebody else, and* not myself."

"And I am so foolish," said the minister, with smile, "as to like yourself best of all; and so does s Isabel, if you saw her heart. You'll come and see l with me."

"To please you," said the girl, not meaning a coquetry, nor thinking of the tenderness with wh words so unusually soft moved this man, who mi have been her father. Even as she spoke her e caught some passing figure in the distance, which w like that of the lover whom she fancied she had abjure and her heart sprang up and began to beat furious against her breast. She knew very well it was n Stapylton—but the merest vision that reminded her him, how different was the feeling it awakened with her! She walked on leisurely by Mr. Lothian's sid making him soft answers, which, in spite of all l better knowledge, filled him with a sweet intoxicatic And all the time her object was to lead him artful with all the youthful skill of which she was mistr to some allusion to her lover. "Are you glad to alone?" she said at last, stooping, as she did so, pluck off a thorny branch which had caught her dre And he did not even perceive what that leading qu tion meant, so wrapt was he in the delusion which half-intentionally in her unconscious selfishness for l own purposes—she had been weaving round him.

"I would not be glad to be alone if I could ha the company I like best," said the deluded man; a so, deceiver and deceived, they went along the qu rural way.

END OF VOL. I.

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IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

THE

MINISTER'S WIFE.

BY

MRS. OLIPHANT.

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LEIPZIG

BERNHARD TAUCHNITZ

1869.

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THE MINISTER'S WIFE.

CHAPTER I.

HEN Isabel found herself once more in the drawn at Lochhead, it wrought the most curious upon her. For weeks past she had been living er stepmother alone, hearing nothing of more than Jean's gossip, falling unconsciously into bits of the humbler life. Her mind was so d by her grief that she had fallen back with a tion she had never before been sensible of, upon mble love which surrounded her. And in that f final ending and conclusion which calamity to the young, she had made up her mind that nd the children were henceforward to be her terests. She herself was dead with her twin- Existence was but a grey and patient round of and duty. Her heart was so hushed and with the shadow of her first great sorrow, that not rebelled against this decision, nor had she she would otherwise have done, the departure lover, after the first fever of excitement into he had thrown her, and the illness consequent It had seemed the natural fulfilment of all her ns. He was gone—everything was gone, exe quiet, and Jean's homely consolations, and e of "the bairns."

But the Lochhead drawing-room awoke in a moment a crowd of other thoughts. The other side of life rose up upon her as by a sudden transformation. She who had been learning to content herself in the blue-and-white elbow-chair by the kitchen fire, felt a sudden thrill run over her when she was placed by Miss Catherine, close to herself, upon the velvet sofa, with her feet on the Turkey carpet, with the portrait over her head of a stately lady in powder and ruffles, who was her ancestress as well as Miss Catherine's, and with all the countless details of an ancient "gentle" house visible on every side. Lochhead was old-fashioned and very far from fine. But yet Buckingham Palace could scarcely have been more distinct from the kitchen at the Glebe, or even from the little parlour, which, now Margaret had gone out of it, was destitute of all grace to compensate for its grey, pictureless walls and unlovely furniture. Isabel felt herself "a lady born," as she took the place of honour by Miss Catherine's side. Her heart woke up in her breast. After all, this was her natural sphere—this, and not the homely, low-roofed room, with its two latticed windows and whitewashed walls—and the children coming in from school. The impression of the still life round her was stronger than that of anything which was said. She sat almost silent, while Miss Catherine and the minister talked, but with a mind awaking to all the influences about her—the grace, the superior softness, the refinement of the place. Life here must, it seemed to Isabel, be a different thing from the life she had always known. There were books of all kinds about, and her appetite for book was great, though as yet it had been but scantily

supplied. The ample window gave an amount of atmosphere and breadth to the room, which Isabel perceived by instinct, without knowing how it was. It was very nearly the same view as that from the parlour window at the Glebe, and she could not tell what made the difference; unless indeed it was the superior grandeur, splendour, amplitude of the life. There were a hundred resources within, which were impossible at her lower level of existence, and a much widened perception of the world without. She had no notion that it was the old furniture and the great windows which impressed this so strangely upon her. It was something in the atmosphere, the expanded breathing, and hearing, and seeing of a larger life.

And as the minister accompanied her home, Isabel, unawares, fell into a little self-revelation. "You can see the same view out of the village windows," she said, "and from the Glebe; but the Loch is grander and the braes are higher, and away down to Clyde is like a picture—I don't know how it is."

"You like it better than the Glebe?"

"I cannot tell," said Isabel; "it is so different; and so many things to fill your life. I think I would never tire reading; but then I know my books off by heart, and reading them is little good. And there's always a seam. I know a seam is *right*," said Isabel, with decision; "I did not mean that."

"But sometimes you would like something else," he said, growing foolish as he looked at her; and finding something half divine in her girlish simplicity.

"I don't know," she said; "I have made up my mind *to be content. But still* one has eyes, and one

can see it is different. I never thought—of such things—before." And a rush of tears came to her pensive eyes.

Mr. Lothian left her finally at the door of the Glebe, and found himself in such a state of *attendrissement* that he rushed in once more upon Miss Catherine as he passed the house. "Life is beginning to stir within her," he said with excitement; "she is feeling that all is not over and past. The sight of you has done her good."

"The sight of me is not difficult to be had," said Miss Catherine, "though it's early yet, after a death, to get good from the like of that."

"She is so young," said the minister, "her mind goes quicker than yours and mine. Not that she grieves less; but everything goes quicker—the days, and the events, and the beats of the heart."

"I doubt if you would take as much trouble to understand the beats of my heart," said Miss Catherine. "Minister, you're a sensible man in other things——"

Mr. Lothian retreated from her look, and turned to the window. In comparison with himself, Miss Catherine was an old woman; but still, when he was brought to task for it, he had nothing to advance in defence of his love.

"You need not turn away your face," she said, with a smile, "as if I had not seen it grow red and grow pale many a time at the lassie's glance. And she's but a bairn when all is said. It's a mystery to me. A woman of your age would think as little of a *lad of* hers, as of an infant. And yet you, an honest man, that might be her father, let such a lassie fill up

your very heart. No! you are a man and I am a woman; you might explain till ye were tired, and I would never understand. A man is a queer being, and, so far as I can see, we must take him as he is till his Maker mends him. And about Isabel, if that lad does not come back——"

"Whether he comes back or not," said Mr. Lothian, hotly; "he has disgusted her so much that she will never think of him again."

Miss Catherine shook her head. "Make what progress you can while he's away," she said. "Keep him away if you can; but don't you trust to her disgust. He is her first love?"

"I suppose so," said the minister, with a very rueful face.

"Then she'll forgive him all," said Miss Catherine, with perhaps a thrill of painful knowledge in her voice; there was a vibration in it which made her companion glance round at her with keen momentary curiosity. But her face betrayed no story. "She'll forgive him all," she repeated; "and to undeceive her would take a long time. Perhaps it's only by dint of marrying him that a woman finds out what's wanting in her first love. And you would not like her to go through that process. But if he keep away——"

Mr. Lothian's face had gone through as many alternations of hope and fear as though he had been on trial for his life. "He loves her," he said under his breath, "as well as he knows how."

"But he loves himself better," said Miss Catherine; "and if he has to hang about at home for fear of being disinherited *he'll save you* some trouble here. And

there is no other man about the parish to come in your way——"

"Her thoughts are differently employed," he said, with a little annoyance. "What does she know of the men in the parish—or care——"

"That's very true, no doubt," said Miss Catherine, gravely. "There was never one like her on the Loch, nor a lad worthy of her, since Wallace Wight. But yet Isabel has eyes like her neighbours. And there is nobody in your way. My word! if I were a comely man like you, little the worse for your years, and not another suitor in the field, she should be Isabel Lothian before the year was out!"

Mr. Lothian coloured like a girl with excitement and gratification. Scarcely on Isabel's own cheeks could there have risen a purer red and white. He was, as Miss Catherine said, "little the worse for his years." He was as erect and elastic in his step as if he had been five-and-twenty—his colour as fresh, and his eyes as bright. To be sure his hair was getting white; but that, like powder, had an embellishing effect. And though the minister has appeared in these pages under an invariably serious aspect through the shadow thrown by Margaret Diarmid's death-bed, yet there was nothing gloomy in his character. On the contrary, he was capable of almost boyish exuberance when unwonted holiday or delight came in his way. He flushed with pleasure as Miss Catherine spoke—

"If it depends on me"—he said, with a sparkle in his eye.

"And who else should it depend on?" said Miss Catherine. "Take your courage by both hands, and, take my word, you'll not fail."

Thus the house of Lochhead rained influence this eventful day. Isabel went home with a va longing in her mind for wider air and a fuller But when the minister had left the door, going l with his mind full of tenderness, and just touched hope, she sat down by the parlour window, and out Stapylton's letter, and began to read herself satisfaction with it. The careless words which struck her like stings at the first reading, she set self to smooth and soften. "He meant them to c me," she said to herself; "to be cheery himself an cheer me;" and then she would make an effort swallow the sentences to which no such explana could be applied. "It was all his love," she again. Words change their character when thus stu out of what seemed almost an insult this te casuistry brought but another proof of the confid and certainty of love. "He did not choose his wo Isabel said at length, with a certain indignation ag herself; "he felt I would understand—how shou miss understanding when I knew his heart?" then there were other apologetic murmurings, assured, but not less anxious. "After all he is b man—he does not think like the like of us;" a "That will be the English way; he always said it different." Thus the fanciful girl went on with letter, until at length she kissed and put it away an her treasures, all anger having gone out of her h When she had accomplished this, Isabel could sca deny to herself that the shadow of grief and pain grown lighter. It was not that she forgot her s With an unconscious heresy, which every theolo in the parish would have condemned as idolatry,

referred her thoughts to Margaret still, with a soft fervent earnestness, an inward breathing very like a prayer. "*She* could tell me—oh, my Maggie, if you would but tell me!" she murmured in her heart. But still her heart was lighter. The sun was shining again, skiffs were darting across the loch, one last gleam of brightness before the winter came on the woods and hills. And Isabel could not but open timidly like a daisy in the grass, to the sun. When she kissed Stapylton's letter, a vision rose before her of their next meeting. He would come back. What he said about a meeting on the Border was but a jest, as she ought to have known. He would come back. He would woo her as a lady should be wooed; and some kind angel —why not Margaret?—would softly sweep out of the minister's mind any thought that he had ever loved poor Isabel. She assured herself that he could not love her much—that it must be a fatherly affection, very different from the love of a lover—and that when the moment had come, and the bridegroom stood beside her, ready to carry her away from Loch Diarmid, into the great vague, shining world—Mr. Lothian would bless the young pair, and send them consoled out of the last possibility of pain. She settled it all in every detail while she sat looking from the parlour window. Through all the interview between Miss Catherine and the minister, in which so very different an aspect of her affairs was discussed, Isabel sat gazing on the loch as it faded to evening, with a vague smile about her mouth, and liquid soft eyes, and dreamed. She saw how it would all happen as well as she saw the boat on the Loch making its way from Ardnamore. Perhaps he might not come for three or even six months.

THE MINISTER'S WIFE.

BY

MRS. OLIPHANT.

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BERNHARD TAUCHNITZ

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before the kirk-session, that body had so quieted down, and was so thankful for a little repose, that nothing was done. Quietness fell on the Loch; the winter passed, with sweeping storms of rain and brilliant gleams of sunshine, and all that languor of imprisoned life which falls on a rural parish in the dead season. The talk of the women at the cottage-doors dwindled till it reached the low level of half-a-dozen sharp words ringing from one side of the street to the other, when the air was clear with frost.

"Jenny Spence, our Robert's just come in, and he says your man has gane into Maryburgh with a load of peat to the factor."

"Eh me, I'm no fond o' Maryburgh. It's an awfu' place for keeping the men late—and him with the minister's turnips on his mind!"

"It's time enough for the turnips the morn, and it's a fine night."

"O, ay, a fine night, but real sharp. I maun shut the door, for the bairns have a' coughs."

To this scanty, necessary kind of communication was the parish conversazione reduced. The men bore up better in the smithy, in the red glow of the fire; they gathered in the ruddy corner within sight of the blaze, and continued their usual tattle about current events with scarcely diminished vigour; and throughout the parish there were a few tea-drinkings, and neighbours would tap at the friendly doors or open the trustful latch with a "How's a' wi' ye?" to make up for the fewer meetings out of doors. Winter was never very hard at Loch Diarmid. The sea air, which breathed its subtle influence like the tide through all the crevices of the hills, kept away all keen frosts and

r chills of snow. The hills now and then put o
glistening garments, and shone like so man
-robed prophets in the sun; but the braes ke
n, or, rather, kept their natural mixture of colo
e red-brown of the ploughed land, the grey rust
brown of the leafless trees, the rusty stretch
d heath, the spots of humid, verdant turf. It w
nder and marvel told for years when there ha
d to be a great fall of snow; and in this ye
e was none, except on the hills. But the Loc
ld toss itself into wrath now and then, and th
to the outside world would be partially barre
imprisonment outside moved the parish to a litt
kening of intercourse within. The people in th
e villas down the Loch had mostly retired to spen
winter in some less complete retirement, but suc
hem as were left would ask Mr. Lothian to dinne
ing his steady mare fully employed.

"He'll break his neck some night over those dar
s," said Christie Steel, his housekeeper, "aye ri
like a young man. Why canna he get a sob
wi' lamps to it, like his father before him?"

But the minister himself had no fear of any suc
equences. It was said on the Loch that he g
like a young man every day.

"He's younger-looking now than when he came t
parish fifteen years ago," people said. "It's exe
and being out in all weathers that does it.
e, it's ease of mind now thae prophesyings ar
." "It's neither the one nor the other, but
de lass——"

After this fashion the minister and his ways wer
ssed in the parish. Mr. Galbraith smiled an

looked—not even wisdom itself restraining him—like one who knew all about it. Mr. Lothian alone knew nothing about it; his courage and heart had come to him afresh. He had hopes that seemed to brighten every day; his worn life seemed about to blossom out into a new spring. It was even much to him that the religious excitement in the parish had almost ceased, and that things were returning to their usual course. He had quietness without, and he had such expectations to brighten him within as he had never before ventured to entertain. It was like a spring and no winter in the records of his life.

And all was very quiet at the Glebe. Day after day, week after week—nay month after month, Isabel had sat silent, expecting, looking for the letter which never came, for the familiar step and voice which she had made so sure would come back to her. And neither letter nor visitor had come to break the wistful silence; no one knew the longing looks she cast from her window, as the winter twilight darkened night by night, over the gleaming surface of the loch. She felt sure he must write, until the time was past for writing; and then a strange confidence that he would come seized upon her. And she had no one to whom she could say a word of her expectations, to whom she could even whisper his name. If Jean perceived her eager watch for the postman, her shivering start and thrill when any footstep was audible by night, or knock came to the door, she mentioned it to no one. Three months and not a word,—then six months, the year turning again unawares, the snow melting from the hills, the snowdrops beginning to peep above the surface of the soil—

It became the one absorbing thought of Isabel's life. She thought she had betrayed herself a hundred times a day. But the fact was that nobody thought of her secret. She was passive and subdued, it is true; but no doubt that was the shadow of death in which she had been so recently enveloped. The minds of her friends had taken a sudden leap away from that disagreeable subject. They agreed to forget the very existence of Stapylton. He was gone, and had left no trace of him in the district—why should there be any trace of so unworthy an intruder in any heart? They had made up their minds that Isabel had forgotten him, and went calmly on their way pleased with that conclusion. It was strange that they should have found it possible thus to delude themselves—but such things occur every day; what they wished they believed, taking their desires for granted. And Isabel, whom they all considered themselves so tender and indulgent to, feeling that in one point there was no pity, nor sympathy for her, shut up her thoughts in her own breast. They were sad enough thoughts sometimes. Now and then it was impossible for her to escape from the conviction that her lover had forgotten her. She would steal out and sit under the little birch-tree on the hill-side, with her work in her lap, but doing nothing, gazing eagerly along the winding road, wondering at the blank of distance, out of which no one came. Sometimes the figure of a tourist would move her to a gleam of hope. But still he never appeared. There were various explanations given of her favourite post under the birch in the parish, and why she went there. Could it be, like Margaret, to pray? *Could it be to* escape from the constant com-

panionship of Jean Campbell? Could it be, as her stepmother thought, that these visits to the hill were but assumed to cover a continual visit to the churchyard and Margaret's grave? But no one thought of Stapylton, or of the unexpressed longing that moved Isabel. Oh, if he would but come! She began at length to feel almost indifferent as to how he came. If it were but to say farewell for ever, to tell her he would never more come back to her, Isabel felt as if she would have been satisfied; but to keep her thus in uncertainty, in this long suspense between hope and fear—that, indeed, was almost more than she could bear.

And it would be impossible to describe all the alternations between fear and hope which moved her as the months went on. Spring came, stretching day by day, more green, more warm, more cheery and sunny on the hills. The poor girl, in her loneliness, sat watching, holding on, as it were, to the darker season which melted away under her grasp, taking comfort in every gloomy day, saying to herself, "It is winter still!" The birds warbling in all the trees about was a trouble to her. No; not spring again—not so far on as everybody thought: only a little lightening of the cold, or gleam of exceptional weather. She kept this thought steadily before her mind, through March and April, refusing to understand what months they were. But in May she could no longer refuse to perceive. The trees had shaken out all their new leaves from the folds. The hill-side was sweet with wild flowers, the primroses were over. "Everything is so early this year," Isabel said to herself with a sick heart.

"No so early either," said Jean, with profoun
nsciousness of her step-daughter's sentiments; "r
t early. I've seen the lilac-tree in flower a for
ht sooner than now."

And then the girl could no longer shut her eye
ter was over; the charm of early summer was i
air; everything had come again—the lambs, th
s, the flowers, the sunshine, the fresh thrill of li
brightness—everything except Margaret, who w
l; and Stapylton, who was lost; and these tw
e all in all to Isabel.

Her friends perceived that she was going throug
e crisis, but it did not occur to them to think what
. When she was questioned, she would weep, an
nd them of her sister, who alone did not com
t with the flowers she loved, and all accepted it a
fficient apology for her redoubled melancholy
l the plea was not a false one; more and mo
y day she missed her sister, her authority and he
pathy. But it was so far false that another nam
conjoined to that of Margaret. Of him she sai
ing. Her heart going back upon itself, decide
inexpressible silent pangs, that now he would n
e—and yet each morning she looked for him agai
fresh hope. And no one knew of it. He
ggle was absolutely her own. She preserved
ously, never mentioning his name, or referrin
him, either to Miss Catherine or the ministe
even to Jean had her mind been opened. Sh
nder her birch-tree, waiting with a silent anguis
grew ever greater and greater, waiting for hin
nning to realise, with more or less distinctnes
her hope was in vain.

CHAPTER II.

This state of things could not go on for ever. Miss Catherine, who had made a hundred vain exertions to draw her young kinswoman to her house, and out of all the melancholy associations of her own, at last became seriously alarmed about Isabel. And the minister, who all the winter through had been indulging himself in such hopes, slowly woke to a perception of the absorbed looks, the languor, the wandering of her eye, and the paleness of her cheeks. She was very soft to him and gentle, accepting his kindness as she had never done before, looking up to him in a way which filled him with a thousand fond dreams. She had done this with unconscious selfishness, because she wanted the support of affection and kindness, not with any thought of him. She was struggling along her solitary way with so much expenditure of strength and life that it would have seemed hard to Isabel to deny herself that comfort on the road, the anxious devotion that surrounded her like a soft atmosphere. And yet she did not mean to be selfish; but by-and-bye they all found out that her strength and heart were failing her. "I canna tell what it is," Jean said, with her apron to her eyes; "she'll sit for hours on the hill, and syne she'll come home that worn, she hasna a word for one of us; and her eyes aye wandering miles away, as if she were looking for somebody. I canna tell what it is."

"It cannot be any of their wild notions," said Miss Catherine, anxiously, "of Margaret coming back from the grave."

"Na, na, she has a' her senses," said Jean; "
look as pleased now and then when she see
minister coming up the brae."

Mr. Lothian's cheek flushed, but he shook his
"Alas! it is not for me," he said; and yet a
secret hope that perhaps it pleased her to watc
approach crept into his heart.

"It cannot be that English lad she's thinkin
said Miss Catherine; and Mr. Lothian, struck as
a sudden chill, raised his head and fixed his
anxiously on Jean's face.

"She never mentions his name," said Jean.
reason to think she was awfu' angry at him. The
she fainted she let fall words in her sleep—N
canna be that."

"Provided it is not her health," said Mis
therine; and Jean again raised her apron tc
eyes.

"I darena say it even to mysel," she cried
will not say it; but, O Miss Catherine, that's my
night and day. I try to shut my eyes, but I
forget that our Margaret was much the same.
ken weel she was a perfect saint, and it was p
and the Book that filled her mind. But at first,
her illness was coming on, she would sit like th
and look and look! It makes me that sick wl
think o't, that I canna sit and look at the othe
going the same gait. I canna do it. I think i
break my heart."

"The same gait!" said the minister, raisi
blanched face of woe, "the same road as—Marg
No, no—don't say so. It cannot be!"

But both the women shook their heads.

"I canna be mistaken, that hae watched them baith," said Jean, with her apron to her eyes.

"And we all know it's in the family," said Miss Catherine, sinking her voice to solemnity.

There came a sudden groan out of the minister's breast. He turned away from them to the other end of the room, with a pang to which he could give no expression. No, no—God could not do it: it was impossible. Margaret—yes—whose visionary soul was fixed on heaven from her cradle; but Isabel, impetuous faulty, sweet human creature, whose presence made the whole world bright. No, no;—after all, God had some regard for the hopes and wishes of His creatures: He would not thwart and trample upon their hearts like this.

"It's in the family," repeated Miss Catherine. "Her mother, my kinswoman, Margaret Diarmid, was no five-and-twenty—and her sister younger still; and the branch of the family is extinct, you may say, barring Isabel. But so far as flesh and blood can strive, I'll fight for the lassie's life."

Mr. Lothian had no power of speech left; but he came to her and took her hands in his, and pressed them with a look of gratitude such as no words could express.

"She shall not be lost if I can help it," repeated Miss Catherine. "It may be a kind of brag to say but there are many things that can be done when you take it in time. Leave her to me, Mr. Lothian, and do not break your heart."

This conversation took place while Isabel was absent on one of her usual visits to the hill. When

the minister had left them, Miss Catherine turned to Jean and began to inquire into the girl's symptoms.

"She has no cough," she said; "I have noticed that. But now that man is gone, tell me, Jean Campbell, are ye sure it's not a pining for yon English lad?"

"I canna tell," said Jean doubtfully, shaking her head. "Whiles I hae my doubts. She had aye a craving about the post at first. That's past. But if she hears a footstep sudden in the road, or maybe a neighbour, coming in for a crack, lifting the latch at the outer door, she gives a start that drives me wild; but she never names him. And there were some words she let drop——"

"Don't tell me of words," said Miss Catherine. "It was her first love, and there's nothing in this world she'll not forgive him. That's it. And now I see what I must do."

But nothing was done that day, nor for several weeks after. It was, as so often happens, the very crisis of Isabel's affairs on which they first discussed the question. When she came home that evening she was ill. The spring winds were cold, and she had taken a chill on the wet braes; and for some weeks every symptom which could most afflict her friends made its appearance. It was whispered in the Loch, with much shaking of heads, that the Captain's Isabel was soon to follow her sister: that she had fallen into 'a decline;" that she had never recovered Margaret's death; and even that the twin sisters had but one life between them according to the common superstition, and that the one could not long outlive the other. These *prognostications* reached the minister's ears,

moving him to a misery of which the people who caused it had not the remotest conception. On the whole the parish, though deeply grieved, enjoyed talking this matter over; and even Jean Campbell, though her heart, as she said, was breaking, had long consultations with Miss Catherine, and with Jenny Spence, and many other anxious visitors, touching the resemblance between Isabel's illness and the beginning of Margaret's. She was rather bent, indeed, on making this out to be the case, although her tears flowed at every suggestion of danger to her remaining charge.

"Her cough has taken no hold of her; she'll shake it off," said Miss Catherine.

"I mind when Margaret's was no more than that," Jean would answer, shaking her head. And notwithstanding the profound pain which the thought of any approaching misfortune to Isabel gave them, there was almost a degree of mournful enjoyment in the comparing of notes and exchanges of confidences which took place among the nurses. But the effect was very different upon the minister. The mere thought of danger to her acted upon him like a temptation to blasphemy. In such a case what would remain to him but to curse God and die? He could not acquiesce even in God's will, if it took from him the one love of his life; he went about his work like a man distracted with feverish cheek and troubled eye, doubting everything, feeling no foundation of truth or comfort on which he could rest. All the devotion of which he was capable was a faint cry of "Isabel, Isabel!" half supplication, half remonstrance with the cruel heaven. Without her what would the world be to him, or anything it contained? He was almost crazed by the

dread which spread a curtain over earth and heaven, and darkened the whole universe. It seemed to him that her sweet life, if once assailed, might come to an end any moment; and he could not rest, but kept waking in the middle of the night, wandering to the door at every hour of the day to see if, perhaps, some messenger had come for him from the Glebe; but yet, wherever he went, people met him with questions. "Have you heard how the Captain's Isabel is the day?" "Eh, I thought she would gang like her sister." "Ye see twins, ye never can separate them in life or death." Such were the comments he was in the daily habit of hearing; and they stung him so that every day was full of torture—pain which, after the bright dreams he had been indulging in, was doubly hard to bear.

But as it turned out the pain was unnecessary. Isabel had caught cold, her body being susceptible at all points, and her mind unhinged—just such a cold as might, had her constitution been weaker, have ended as Margaret's had done. Jean was right in her diagnosis—just as Isabel's illness began Margaret's had begun; there had been, even to some extent, the same cause. The shock which Mr. John's love, and the painful interruption of it had given her, had unstrung Margaret's strength just as Stapylton's absence had done her sister. But there the resemblance stopped. The elder sister's constitution was feeble and Isabel's was strong, and other influences besides that of disappointed love had come in, in Margaret's case. The shock had struck at all the delicacies of her nature, and made her sick of the life in which such thoughts could *be. And her contemplative* nature, her visionary

heart had taken refuge in heaven. Isabel's trial and her struggle were less—the circumstances were different. Instead of the Captain to vociferate against her suitor and reproach her if she looked sad, she had soft, compassionate silence all around her, everybody sympathising with her, no one asking what her sorrow was. Margaret had been surrounded by a closer domestic group; first, the Captain, loud and rough and peremptory, incapable of comprehending any scruple of her delicate mind; then Jean, not yet sufficiently mellowed by love to understand the visionary girl; and Isabel was still too young, too foolish and heedless to have one sigh of the breaking heart breathed into her bosom. But so far as Isabel was now concerned, all this was changed. Jean had been trained by long watching of them, and by love which had grown in the interval into an instinctive apprehension of her stepdaughter's moods; and there was Miss Catherine, with all her faculties quickened by the loss of Margaret; and Mr. Lothian, whose power of observation was increased tenfold by his love. They asked her no questions, they made no comments, but they surrounded and wrapt her about in an atmosphere of tenderness and observance. Her looks were studied, her wishes anticipated, her very thoughts divined. Sometimes even under such circumstances the life must end, the weary soul go forth from earth before it is satisfied; but with Isabel it was not so. Her illness, though it lasted only for a few weeks, looked like an interval of months or years. It put Stapylton at a distance from her. So long as she had lain in her sick room, all expectation of his coming or longing for it had gone out of her heart; and as she recovered the thought

came back but dimly to her. She had not forgotten him, but time had gone faster than its wont, and he was further off than she could have supposed,—drifted away.

Then Miss Catherine, moved by the urgency of the case as she had scarcely ever before been moved, announced her intention of taking Isabel away for change. As soon as she was able to move, they went to one of the watering-places in which Scotland believes—the Bridge of Allan, and then to Edinburgh. It was not a very long journey, but everything was new to Isabel. It roused her in spite of herself. Youth gained the ascendancy over all the facts which had lessened its brightness. So many new things to see, the bright summer weather, the change and movement,—the sight of crowds and novelties, drove things more urgent out of her mind. And then she was Miss Catherine's close companion, accompanying her everywhere—sharing all her thoughts. Miss Catherine, though she had lived chiefly on Loch Diarmid, had been sufficiently in the world to be aware of much which had never dawned upon Isabel. She knew everybody they met as they drove or walked about the streets,—that is, everybody who was, as she herself said, "worth knowing." And she knew not only the people, but their histories, the tragical incidents which are hidden in so many family records; the loves and feuds, the misfortunes which make the smoothest life a mystery. She told Isabel endless stories, not visions of romance, but the sadder, more awful stories which we are not permitted to use in fiction, authenticated by real details of place and date, and recollections of "When I saw them last," such *as gave them an intensity* of interest beyond the

reach of invention. "There was a very strange story about these two," she would say, when they had passed some placid couple. "I remember it as if it were yesterday, when I was a girl in Edinburgh, attending classes. Remind me to tell you when we get home." Thus wisdom would flow from her lips, not the abstract results of a life's experience, but those individual instances which are more effectual than philosophy. The "Arabian Nights" were scarcely more varied, more endless, flowing on from father to son—from grandmother to grand-daughter—revelations of all the profounder deeps of life. Isabel listened with intent eyes and lips apart, recognising the difference between the world outside and the world within with such a pang of surprise and thrill of interest as are natural to the young. Was it the cheerful pair whom she met driving, or riding, or walking about the daylight world, morning after morning, to whom that convulsion had happened? Was it the peaceful, mild old man, who took off his hat to her as he passed, who had that tragedy in his life? Was it true that scarcely one of all those smiling people round were without some mark which had been a wound, some break in their existence where life and death—or shame and honour—or love and hate, had struggled for the mastery? Her own thoughts stood still to contemplate the changed world round her, secretly questioning its meaning. Oh! what curt suggestions of anguish, what heart-breakings conveyed in few words, were in Miss Catherine's talk. It filled Isabel, in the softness of her youth, with a wondering reverence and pity—compassion unspeakable and awe for the silent, smiling earth, which bore so much and made no complaint. And slowly her own

ittle story—a story scarce begun, not yet tinged with he deeper shades of human mystery, rose up like a urtain rolling itself together before it vanished altoge-her like a mist upon the freshening wind.

And then Mr. Lothian came and paid them frequent visits; so frequent that the parish was moved to its depths, and grumbled at his repeated absence. "We might a' dee for what he cares," said the women at the village-doors; and even John Macwhirter, though unused to interfere, gave forth his opinion on the subject: "I'm no a man to insist on a call from the minister every other day," he said. "He's enough ado with his sermons, if he gives his mind to them as he ought; but he's an aulder man than me that have half-a-dozen weans to think of; and a bonnie example that is to his flock, trailing over half the country after a young lass. Lord, if I was like him I would bide. Ye wouldna see me bring wife and bairns on my head at his time of life; and a young wife's a bonnie handful for an auld man. Ye may gloom, Mr. Galbraith, but you're no far from the same way of thinking yoursel."

"I'm thinking there's many young lasses in Edinburgh and many things of more importance," said the Dominie. "Mr. Lothian hasna left the parish for years. And his sermons are running dry, if you'll take my opinion. No doubt the world's a wicked place, but it does the best of men good to see it now and again. I wouldna say, John Macwhirter, but even you yourself might take a hint from smiths of more advanced views. And as for a divine——"

"You're grand at your jokes," said the half-offended blacksmith; "*but if I were* to take hints, as ye call it,

in the same kind of style as the minister, I would like to ken what my Margret would say? She would be neither to haud nor to mind."

"Now, I was saying," continued the Dominie, "a divine has most need of all. He hears what folk are thinking, and a' the new wiles o' the Evil One to fortify your spirits against them. Maybe you think the Auld Enemy is always the same?—which shows how much you know about it. No, no, John. Keep you to your anvil and your iron, and let the minister alone."

"Na, if it's the deevil he's studying I've no a word to say," said John; "a' the world kens there's nae teacher for that like a woman;" and having thus secured the last word and the victory, as far as the applauding laughter of his audience was concerned, John proceeded to constitute himself the champion of the minister when the Dominie withdrew from the field. "After a' thae prophets and trash, I'm no surprised he should take the play, but he'll be cleverer than I take him for if he gets bonnie Isabel."

"It would be the best thing she could do, a lass with no friends," said one of the bystanders.

"But she'll not do it," said the blacksmith, confidently, wrapping himself all at once in a flaming mist of sparks. Such was the general opinion of the Loch. "I canna believe she'll have the sense," Jean Campbell said, to whom it was most important; and after a while the parish almost forgave the minister for his neglect of them in consideration of the interest with which they regarded his suit. Everybody, except Isabel herself, was aware of the conspiracy against her. To herself it appeared strange that Miss Catherine, out of love for her, should leave the Loch and her own home

long, and waste the early summer, which was
vourite season, in the dusty, windy Edinburgh str
abel accepted the sacrifice with the faith of her
personal attachment, and said to herself that
uld never be grateful enough to her old friend.
uld not but acknowledge to herself that the cha
d made of her a new creature. She looked,
ought, and spoke, and felt herself so to do wi
ch of soft surprise—like one of the young la
om she had sometimes seen at Lochhead. She,
a lady born—yet with envy and wonder she
ked at the strangers, whose look and air wer
erent from her own. They were not different r
nsibly to herself Isabel had acquired another
d air. Her soft Scottish speech was still as Sc
ver, but it was changed. She felt herself to m
a different way, all her sensations were differ
metimes she thought of the Glebe with a thril
nge alarm. To go back to Jean and her child
d the solitude without books, without variet
ld she do it? Or if that was all in store for
s it not cruel to have brought her to this diffe
?

"Now bring me some of your friends from
llege, and let her hear you talk," said Miss
rine, in furtherance of her deep design. The mini
om she addressed, only shook his head with a do
smile.

"What will she care for our talk?" he said. "
sense of a ball-room would please her better.
ld take my friends for a parcel of old fogies;
ndeed we are."

"And ready to go to the stake for your own not

all the same," said Miss Catherine, with much scorn. "Are you, or am I, the best judge of what she'll think? As for ball-rooms, heaven be praised, in her mourning that's out of the question; and if she set her eyes upon a man under forty, except in the street, it may be your fault, but it shall not be mine."

"Will that serve me, I wonder? or is it fair to her?" said the scrupulous minister.

"The more I see of men, the more I feel what fools they all are," said Miss Catherine; "go and do what I tell you, minister, and leave the rest to me."

And accordingly Miss Catherine Diarmid's lodging became the scene of a few gatherings, which to a girl more experienced in society than Isabel would have looked sufficiently appalling. But Isabel, with her mind and intelligence just awakened, and with that fresh sense of ignorance which made her intelligence doubly attractive, regarded them as banquets of the gods. Mr. Lothian's friends were unquestionably old fogies; they had their ancient jests among themselves, at which they laughed tumultuously, and the outer world stared; and they had endless reminiscences, also among themselves, which were far from amusing to the uninitiated. But then by times they would talk as people talked in the old days when conversation was one of the fine arts. And Isabel opened her great brown eyes, and her red lips fell a little apart, like the rose-mouth of a child. She listened with an interest and admiration, and shy longing to take part, and shyer drawing back which made it impossible, which altogether rapt her quite out of herself. And her eyes turned with a certain pride to the minister, who would take his full share, and was not afraid to lift his lance

ainst any professor of them all. Isabel raised
tty head when he spoke, and followed his wo
th quiet understanding glances, with rapid c
hension of what he meant, with the ever ready
use of her bright eyes. He could hold his
ong them all; he was not afraid to enter into
ument. He contributed his full share to all t
s going on; and Isabel looking at him grew pr
him—with the partizanship of his parishioner,
nd, and—favourite. Yes, she knew it but too w
s man, whom everybody respected, who was
ver, and popular, and wise, was her own slave if
used to exercise her sovereignty. One glance,
vement of her finger, would have brought him to
e out of the society of the most learned profes
er heaven. For her he would have thrown th
over, and come joyful to her, content to rea
vel to her, or a poem (which to Isabel in her igr
e was, like a novel, the most frivolous of productio
withstanding that they went so to her heart), or e
hold her wool while she wound it, or occupy him
any other foolish way she might require. This
w, and it gave her a strange sense of pleasu
pylton's love had been a different thing altogetl
anding everything, giving nothing. And, besic
d not Stapylton vanished from her life like a t
it was told? She could not but feel a gratification
certainty that a man like Mr. Lothian was t
voted to her service—to her, who was so ignora
t yet nearly up to the level of the other young lad
ugh she flattered herself approaching that lo
ndard day by day.

And all this time Miss Catherine sat, like a be

volent crafty spider at the opening of her net. Nobody divined the deep intention in her choice of her visitors. Not a man under forty, as she had betrayed to Mr. Lothian, ever penetrated within her doors. If the question had been suggested to Isabel, no doubt she would have recognised it as unusual that gentlemen in Edinburgh should be all approaching half a century. But it did not occur to Isabel. She was awed and filled with admiration of the men she saw. It did not come into her heart to ask where were the young men who would have better matched herself and the other girls whose society Miss Catherine cultivated for her sake. Even the chatter of these girls did not enlighten her. They talked of pleasures of which she knew nothing—dancing all night, for instance—but how could it ever be possible for Isabel to dance all night? No, was not this better, loftier, a kind of amusement not inconsistent with all those solemnities of life into which she had had premature admission? Therefore the absence of the youth did not strike her. Miss Catherine was old, and it was natural she should choose her friends to please herself.

CHAPTER III.

"Now," said Miss Catherine, when it approached the end of June, and Edinburgh, like other towns, began to empty itself of its prisoners. "Now, minister, you may go your ways, and settle down in your parish. I am going to take her home."

"Home!" said Mr. Lothian; "to the Glebe?" and his countenance fell. For, to come and go a dozen

times a day to Miss Catherine's lodgings, and to
her young companion constantly under the shelte
her presence, without awaking Isabel's susceptibil
or seeming to seek her, was very different from g
to visit her in her own cottage, putting her on
guard by the very act.

"Yes, to the Glebe!" said Miss Catherine. "D
look at me as if you thought me an old witch. Ma
I am an old witch. No, she is not coming to
house. I mean to plunge her back into her own
Jean Campbell and the bairns; and then if you ca
make something of the situation, it will be your
and not mine."

Mr. Lothian paused, and mused over this last
He smiled a little, and then he shook his head.
might be good for me," he said; "but it would
cruel to her."

"Go away with your nonsense!" said Miss Cathe
"I hope I know the world and what I'm speaking
but men are fools. I have given her all the ch
that was good for her here, and she has had ju
taste of what life is, a flavour to linger in her thou
And now she shall know the cold plunge of the h
coming. Do you think I don't know it will give
pain? But how can I help that? I will show her
she wants, and where she is to get it; and if she
not make up her mind that it is to be found in
Manse parlour, I tell you again it will be your
and not mine."

"My bonnie young darling!" said the min
moved to unusual tenderness; "but I feel as if we
cheating her, conspiring and taking advantage o
innocence. If it could be done at less cost——"

"Go away and mind your own affairs," said Miss Catherine, "leave Isabel to me. Am not I seeking her good? and must I hesitate because my physic has an ill taste? Not I. Go home with your scruples and see what you'll make of it. And you need not take advantage of my work if you have any objections. It's in your own hand."

Upon which the minister went away, shaking his head more and more. "You know my scruples will yield but too soon if Isabel is the price held out before me," he said. And he obeyed his general and went away; but foolishly freighted himself in the very teeth of Miss Catherine's plans, with everything he could think of to lessen the dreariness and change the aspect of the Glebe Cottage. He sent a great box before him when he arrived at Loch Diarmid, which was on Saturday; and on the Monday he hastened up to the cottage, and unpacked the case with his own hands, and took from it pictures and bookshelves, and books to fill them, "a whole plenishing," as it appeared to Jean. "What is this all for?" she said, looking at the arrivals with a sceptical eye.

"It is that Isabel may not think too much of the past when she comes back—that there may be something new to cheer her," said the minister, somewhat struck by a sudden consciousness that his motives were not much more noble or innocent than those of his ally and fellow-conspirator. Jean stood and looked on while he hung the pictures and put up the shelves, very critically, and with her own thoughts.

"Then Isabel is coming back," she said, "and I'm *glad* of it; among all your grandeur she was like to *forget* her home. And by all I can see you mean her

stay, or you would not spend good siller and ti
ing up all this nonsense to please her e'e."

"It is to comfort her heart, if that may be," sa
minister; "that coming back may not be more th
can bear."

Jean was offended, and tossed her head with
patience she did not attempt to conceal. "I'm
for forgetting them that's dead and gone," s
l, "nor changing the place they've been in. F
part I would keep a' thing the same. It's li
ning away from God's hand, to run away from t
ght of a bereavement. And I would rather mi
n our Margaret than look at a' your bonnie p
s; and so, if she's no spoilt, would Isabel."

But Mr. Lothian persevered with his work all t
e. The Isabel who had left the Glebe two mont
re, and the Isabel who was coming back, we
erent creatures. His heart ached for the effect tl
ld plunge" would have upon his love. That
ht make the Manse parlour bright to her, was
t within the bounds of possibility, and one whi
ld (almost) justify any means of operation; but y
trembled with a sensitiveness stronger than a
ing he had ever entertained for himself, strong
a her feeling for herself to think the chill whi
ld fall upon the girl when, out of all the varie
brightness which had surrounded her, she we
e to that utter silence—to the home where M
t's death and vacant place were the chief assoc
s. Some vague general reproach as to the callo
of women breathed through his mind just as
ety for Isabel had brought Miss Catherine to t
ment that men were fools. Miss Catherine hers

was utterly indifferent, or seemed so, to the trial to which she was about to subject her young companion—she had planned it indeed with cruel art. Mr. Lothian had not the self-denial to refrain from taking advantage of it. But yet he denounced the cruelty of the woman who thus planned Isabel's eventual happiness at the cost of so much suffering to begin with. "My bonnie darling!" he said to himself as he went down the brae; and felt, not without a thrill of self-satisfaction, that he had done what he could to neutralize Miss Catherine's unkindness, while at the same moment he put in a little plea for himself.

On the Saturday of Mr. Lothian's return to Loch Diarmid, Miss Catherine intimated her intention to Isabel. "My dear," she said, "the summer is wearing on. I would not say a word about it if I did not see how much better you are. But I think, now that you are able to bear it, we should be thinking of home."

And in a moment the chill which the minister had foreseen fell upon Isabel. It came upon her like a sudden frost, suddenly quenching the light out of her eyes. She said "Yes?" not so much in acquiescence as with a sudden wistful question as to when and how this change was to come.

"I was thinking of the end of the week," said Miss Catherine steadily, "if that would be agreeable to you."

"Anything would be agreeable to me," said Isabel, with a little rush of tears to her eyes—"whatever pleases you. It has been so kind, oh! so kind of you——"

"You are not to speak to me of kindness," said the old lady. "It was a pleasure to myself. But now, God

be thanked! you're well and strong; and bonnie Loch Diarmid will be in all its beauty. Are you not wearying to get home?"

"Oh, yes. I shall be glad——" faltered Isabel. But it took the colour from her cheek, and silenced all the little cheerful strain of talk which by degrees had developed in her. "You have stayed away all this time for me," she said, feeling this a subject on which she could more easily enlarge.

"Yes," said Miss Catherine, without hesitation; "I don't pretend to deny it, my dear. It has been for you. And I am very glad I came. You are a different creature. But all the same it will be a great pleasure to get home."

Isabel said nothing more. Oh, why was not the minister there to take her part? He would have read the sudden dullness in her eye, the change upon her voice. Then a hundred different thoughts flashed across her mind. Foremost of all, was a sudden vivid perception of the grey little parlour where Margaret had died, of the lonely life she should live in it, of the old dreary thoughts that would come back, of the old state of mind, the sick longing for change, the yearning towards the unknown. And now, even the charm of custom, which had trained her into the persuasion that such a life was the only practicable existence for her, had been broken. She knew there were other possibilities, another kind of routine. And so soon as she had made the discovery, it was her fate to go home. Home to Jean Campbell! Jean had been very kind to her, and Isabel was not ungrateful; but to have her stepmother for her sole companion, and a listless ramble over the braes for her sole recreation, and Mary's frocks

to make for all her work—the prospect quenched out all her newly-acquired cheerfulness and strength. And then came the thought how wrong was all this; how unkind to her friends; what a miserable evidence of her own slight and thankless nature. She tried to reason with herself on the subject, but in vain. So she sat for the rest of the day quenched out, making attempts to speak now and then, but failing utterly; trying to smile and to talk as Miss Catherine did about the proposed return. Oh! how the girl envied Miss Catherine! The old woman was as lonely as the young one. She had her duties, it was true; but no one to make Loch Diarmid pleasant to her. And yet how pleased she was to go back to all the tedium! Was it only because she was old and Isabel young?

"You'll feel the change, my dear," said Miss Catherine the day after, as they sat together alone. "It will be a trial to you going home."

"Oh, no," said Isabel, eagerly; and then she made an effort and said, very low, "It will bring everything to my mind—but, then, it was never out of my mind; it will be as if it had all happened over again——"

"It would have been the same sooner or later," said Miss Catherine. "It has to be got over. And now, I hope, you are able to bear it. And when you weary, my dear, you can come to me. I will always be glad to see you—when I have the time."

"Thank you," said Isabel, feeling her heart sink in her breast. Glad to see her—when she had time! After having been a mother to her, and her companion for so long, opening up all her various stores of experience and knowledge on Isabel's behalf, feeding her with legend and tale. And now that was over, too—

ıd Jean Campbell and Jean Campbell's bairns w
l the companions she should have in the dim futu
h, for Margaret! Oh, for the love that was goı
h, for—— Isabel knew not what she would hs
ld. Anything that would have warded off from l
ı blank that was about to come.

"It will not be cheerful for you, Isabel," said M
therine; "but you have a stout heart, and you m
t forget it is your duty. This has been very pleas
the time. It is cheery to see new people and n
ees. But home is aye home."

"Yes," assented Isabel, feeling in her heart tl
ı was the most abandoned of sinners not to be al
feel any rapture at the thought.

"And there is no saying when we may have anotl
h holiday," said Miss Catherine, cheerfully. Isal
ld make no reply. The full force of the chan
hed upon her. The sounds in the street seemed
w melodious as she thought how short a time s
uld have it in her power to listen to them. And
med to her that her friend was quite unaware of t
ult which this intimation had raised in her bres
d Isabel known how cunningly Miss Catherine h
trived it, how she had been working up to tl
nax, and kept the "cold plunge" as her most effecti
pon, the girl's mind would have risen up in ar
inst such cruelty. Miss Catherine left her seat
ancholy, over some work, with every line in l
ı turned downwards, and the new life gone out
, and retired to her own room that she might
ı to chuckle unrestrained over her success. "Sh
ry him, if he ask her, in six weeks," Miss Catheri
l to herself. And then she gave a brief, hs

amused, half-contemptuous thought to the folly of the man who was wasting his whole heart upon such a child,—"At his time of life!" She was contemptuous of his extraordinary fancy, but yet she worked for him with all her craft and all her heart. And then, though it might be foolish in Mr. Lothian, it was the best thing possible for her young kinswoman. There was not a young man in the district who would have been a suitable match for the Captain's Isabel. The young lairds would have thought twice before mingling their undiluted gentility with the alloy of Duncan's daughter. And the young farmers were not good enough for Miss Catherine's relation. And the sons of the Glasgow bodies in the pretty villas on the Loch, had a keen eye to money; and rich as they were, were not rich enough to marry for no other portion than the few drops of good blood which Isabel possessed. But a minister was a gentleman by right of his cloth. Nobody in Scotland could object to such a connexion; and this special minister was well connected in his own person, and well off, and a well-looking man for his years. In short, those years were the only thing against him. Twenty years earlier he might have pretended to a much better match. And it was apparent that Isabel could not do better should she search the country through. Therefore the thing for every Diarmid to do was to promote the marriage to the extent of their united powers.

Left to herself, Isabel cried—not altogether because she was going home—because she was so wicked as not to be glad at going home—because her badness of heart was such that she regretted her holiday life with all its indulgences. When she returned to the

Glebe, should she be able, she asked herself, to resist the movements of her own feelings, to think as little of Stapylton as he did of her, to keep from longing and looking and listening till the suspense brought on another fever? What should she do to occupy herself? to keep off such a humbling absorption in one thought? There was but one bright spot in all the monotonous landscape: the minister would stand by her, whatever happened to her. Night or day she could trust to his sympathy. He would come to her when she called him, stand by her, be her support, her counsellor, her guide. She thought not of him, but of herself, with youth's spontaneous, unintentional selfishness. It did not occur to her to think of him. But so far already Miss Catherine's spells had wrought.

They arrived at Loch Diarmid at the end of the ensuing week; and were met, not only by Mr. Lothian and by the carriage and servants from Lochhead, but also by Jean Campbell, eager to see her charge, and rapturous over the change in her appearance. From the moment in which they left the steamer, Miss Catherine began to carry out her remorseless policy. She kissed Isabel as soon as she had stepped ashore, and took leave of her.

"You'll come and see me, my dear, whenever you have time," she said; "but you've a good long walk to the Glebe, and I will not hinder you now." And Isabel, standing still by her stepmother's side, waiting till Jean had arranged to have some one sent after them with the boxes, watched her friend drive away with an undescribable sinking at her heart. Miss Catherine compelled the minister to enter the carriage with her. *She pulled him* by the sleeve, and whispered

in his ear, and resorted to violent measures to bring him, as she called it, to himself. "Go with her now, and you show her her own power, and you'll spoil all," she said; and the bewildered man yielded. The carriage flashed away, while Isabel stood, not able to believe her eyes, on the little pier. The summer evening light was sweet upon the Loch, glancing down aslant on the braes, which were golden with the setting sun; and the labourers were going home, and all the soft sounds of repose and domestic reunion were in the air. Jean was busy with the man on the pier about the luggage. Since Isabel had left that same spot nearly three months before, nobody of Jean's appearance or manners had come near her, except as an attendant; and it would be difficult to explain the sudden sense of desertion, the cruel solitude, and mortification and falling back upon herself, with which the girl looked after her friend.

Her friend! Had it been love for her at all which had moved Miss Catherine, or only pity, and a disagreeable duty, from which she was glad to be relieved. Was there any one in the world who cared for Isabel—for herself? They had been sorry when she was ill; they had pitied her. Even the minister—he was gone too, with Miss Catherine, leaving her in the first moment of her return all by herself. Tears flooded to Isabel's eyes, and these were driven back by pride, and rushed to her heart again, filling it with a silent bitterness beyond all expression. It was a kind of public affront to her, leaving her there on the pier to make her way home as she could. Even Jean opened her eyes when she returned to the spot where her stepdaughter stood forlorn.

"They might have taken you with them as far
hhead," said Jean. "Is that the way your gra
ads part with you? And the minister, too! I can
erstand it. They might have taken you with th
far as Lochhead."

"I would rather walk," said Isabel, though she h
truggle to enunciate the words; and then the t
k the familiar road and went on together, as if
e all a dream. If this was how it was to be, th
had been a bitter dream, fretting the girl with
apse of a different existence, to which it was cl
had no pretensions. She could not listen to Jea
nely talk, for thinking of what must be going
ween the others. She was not jealous—but
w strange it was! She knew exactly how th
uld be talking; of the journey; of what had h
ed at Loch Diarmid, since the minister returned;
ir recent visitors in Edinburgh. And all this wo
on the same as if Isabel had been there, while s
dged along the dusty way, thrown back upon Je
Lothian would have been more and more
inion that women are cruel if he had seen the s
a pallor, the inward-looking eyes, the quiver of s
sed pain about poor Isabel's face. "Go away w
ur nonsense!" Miss Catherine was saying to him
t very moment. "She must feel the want of y
d feel the difference, or she'll never know her o
rt." And though the process was cruel, perh
s Catherine was right.

There was a little consolation in the chang
ect of the little parlour, the engravings on the wa
r little bookshelves, the volumes the minister h
en. It would not be *his* fault that he had so l

her. And for the first time a sense of pleasure and pride in the watchful, anxious tenderness of her elderly lover, came into Isabel's mind. At that particular moment, she was so forlorn that these marks of his thought for her came sweet to her heart. It could not be his fault. As soon as she had taken off her bonnet, she who had come up the road with such languor, feeling a weariness altogether out of proportion with the fatigue she had undergone, came eager to look at her new treasures. He had consulted her about them all, though she had not known why. She it was who had unwittingly chosen the half-dozen prints which so changed the aspect of the gray walls. He had remembered exactly what she liked, what she had said, shy as her opinions on such subjects always were. Her countenance smoothed out under this influence. Jean, who had been rather contemptuous of the "nonsense," followed her about while she examined everything with anxious eyes. "She's real weel in her health; but oh, I'm feared she's changed," had been Jean's first thought as Isabel's abstracted looks and indifferent answers to all her news chilled her warm delight in her stepdaughter's return. "After a' your grandeur, you'll no think much of your ain little house," she had even said, with a perceptible taunt as they entered it. And Isabel's first step, which had been to sit down on Margaret's sofa, and cry her heart out, had, natural as it was, been a blow to Jean. She had herself become callous to the associations of the place; and she had taken so much trouble to set out the tea there, and brighten it for the home-coming. But when Isabel perceived the change about her, and began to brighten, Jean brightened too.

"Eh! if I had but thought you would have ca
he said. "There's the history o' the Prodigal u
his garret, a' painted and grand, no like thae t
old white things. But I never thought ye would
Oh, ay, it was just the minister! and a foolish thi
was for a man of his years, climbing up on chairs
clammering away like a working man. But so
if you're pleased——"

"Did he do everything himself?" said Isabel.

"Oh, 'deed did he,—everything; and would
dumpit into the loch at the end, if that would
have eased ye. The man's just infatuate. I think sl
I see it—at his time of life."

"He is not so old," said Isabel.

"Ye've gotten to your English the time y
been away," said Jean; "and nae doubt it's
would be, for you that's a lady born—but it d
found so kindly as the auld way. And you're bo
than ever;" she added, walking round her stepdau
with admiring eyes; "and it's a pleasure to see a
that fits like that; and you've gotten a new way of
your hair; you're like some of the Miss Campbells
visit at Lochhead, or that English young lady
was living down the Loch. But eh, my bonnie wo
ye're no like the Captain's Isabel."

"I don't know that there is any difference,"
Isabel, touched in spite of herself by the tears
she in her stepmother's eyes.

"Nor me," said Jean, putting up her apron.
wanna tell what it is, but I see it. Eh, Isabel, I'
auld fool. I've been thinking we might be
happy, now you kent me better. But I see

Glebe's nae place for you now. You'll no bide long here."

"Where should I go to?" said Isabel, with a little bitterness; "no, you need not be afraid. I am wanted nowhere, but in my own house."

"You couldna be any place where you would be mair thought of," said Jean wistfully, "but you're no to be angry at Miss Catherine either. It was want of thought, maybe, or that she took it into her head that you and me—after being so long parted—would like best to be alone."

"Angry! why should I be angry?" said Isabel. "It is not that. I did not think of Miss Catherine. She has been very kind, and I hope I am grateful——"

"You're her ain kith and kin. I dinna see the call for gratitude," said Jean, with a little heat. "And she might have brought ye hame in the carriage, and nae harm done. I never understand your fine folk. But sit down, my lamb, and I'll pour you out your tea, and ye maun try to mind we would a' lay down our lives for you, and that you're in your ain house, and can do as you please."

Perhaps there was a forlorn satisfaction in that, after all. But when Isabel crept to bed, a few hours later, without any visit from the minister, without any communication from Lochhead, her heart was far from light. She wept in the dark when she laid herself down in her own little bed. It had been a dream, that was all; and now she had come back, and was no longer of consequence to any one—a Miss Diarmid, companion of Miss Catherine, and favourite of society no longer; but only the Captain's Isabel, too lowly for

lairds, too high for the peasants. Visions cr
ross her mind of the scenes she had lately take
rt in, of the smiles that had been bestowed u
r, of the interest with which her simple words
en listened to; and now no smiles, no flatter
bute of admiring looks, were to be hers. M
therine had put her back decisively into her c
ce; and the minister—even the minister! Yes,
s very good to her; he had given her books
tures to amuse her, as if she had been a solit
ld. It was the last little mark, no doubt, of
erest in her which she had attributed to anot
ling. But why should Mr. Lothian care for h
y should Miss Catherine care for her? They
en very kind to her, which is quite a differ
tter. They had cured her of her illness, and d
great deal to improve her; and now they had
r back softly, but firmly, at once into her own pl
doubt it was best, Isabel thought, turning her f
the wall, that she should know at once how it
be; but yet it was a strange downfall—and v
d to bear.

She did not go to church on the following Sund
ding her fatigue; and with an unexpressed h
t Miss Catherine would have sent to take her al
h herself; but Miss Catherine took no notice.
de the proper inquiries of Jean, and was sorry
r Isabel was tired; but that was all. Mortificati
er, and disappointed affection, surged up altoget
poor Isabel's mind. The idea occurred to her
away suddenly and secretly, without telling
, as it has done to so many wounded youth

hearts, not to make any claim upon the regard which was so slow to come, but to disappear without a word, leaving them to remember—perhaps, when it was too late—And this dreadful state of things lasted—she never could tell how long. Day after day passed and nobody came. And as the darkness fell on every evening, Isabel renewed her sick dream of disappearing altogether. What! no one? not even the minister! not a soul that cared if she lived or died? In such a state of the heart and mind, a grief to fall back upon is the next best thing to a friend. Isabel's sorrow had been sinking into the soft and tender melancholy—pathetic but not tragic sense of loss—in which Margaret's memory was to be enshrined as long as those who loved her lived; but now, in the destitution of all other food for her heart, she fell back upon this with passionate reopening of the half-healed wound. Margaret had been all her own, had never neglected her, never forgotten her, never thought but of her. One of those forlorn days, with her veil over her face, she made her way, by the most unfrequented paths she could think of, to her sister's grave. It was in a corner of the churchyard, out of the way of passers-by; and Isabel threw herself down by it and clasped her arms round the white stone in all the abandonment of her immediate pain, though that pain was not primarily called forth by the loss of Margaret. After she had wept out all her tears, she still retained her position, her soft arms wound about the stone, clinging to it as she might have clung to her sister, her head leaning against it, her dilated, tear-worn eyes gazing sadly into the air at their full strain, though she saw nothing. Isabella embracing her pot of basil with that ineffable softness

of exhausted passion out of which Holman Hunt has made a second poem—was not more touching than this gentler creature, distraught, she too, with her loneliness, with the great want in her young heart, with the fancied neglect of all she had ever cared for. Not another tear would come—she had spent them all. She clasped Margaret's gravestone in her arms, and laid her cheek upon it, awed yet comforted by the chill of it, by something which she could touch and feel, though it was only unresponsive stone.

She was watched, though she did not know that any one was near. Mr. Lothian had yielded against his will to Miss Catherine's peremptory counsels, but he had kept upon the watch wherever Isabel went, finding out her movements by that strange mesmerism of sympathy which conveys our secrets through the air. He had seen her to the grave, though she had not seen him. And when her tears were over, and she sank down into this melancholy embrace of all that was left to her, the man's heart could bear it no longer. She whom he could scarcely refrain from taking to his protecting arms when she felt but little need of him, how could he stand by and see her clinging to the cold gravestone as to her only refuge? Isabel was too much absorbed, too hopeless of any external consolation, to hear the rustle through the grass as he came to her. He had fallen upon his knees by her side before she roused herself to turn those wistful, strained eyes to him. And then all considerations of what he might or might not do, had been driven out of his mind. He put his arms tenderly round her, not even thinking of love, thinking of nothing but her need. "My *bonnie darling!*" he said with a sob, "my precious

Isabel! It's the living you must come to, and not the dead, my dear! my dear!"

"I have nothing but Margaret in the world," said the girl, with sudden, sharp anguish, the fountain of her tears once more opened by this unexpected tenderness. She thought as little of love or love-making as he did in the sudden flooding of his heart. Nor was Isabel conscious how he drew her away from the chill stone to his own breast, and held her, letting fall actual tears over her as he had not done twice in his life before.

"No, no; not there!" he said, unconscious of his own words, holding her close to him; clasping her fast, and thinking, as men so seldom think, not of himself, but of her. It did not even occur to him how sweet it was to appropriate her thus to himself. It was her want, her absolute need of him, her self-abandonment which he could not bear. "Here, my darling," the man murmured, with a pathetic abnegation of his own feelings, "lean here;" and so held her upon his bosom, schooling himself to be—if need were—her father instead of her lover—anything to comfort her in the moment of her weakness. When Isabel came to herself, he was gazing upon her, as she leant on his shoulder, as if from an unapproachable distance. She was in his arms, and yet his eyes rested on her with wistful reverence, as though she had been miles away.

"I did not mean to be so weak and so foolish," she said, gathering herself away from him with a vivid blush. "I thought I was—alone—I thought——"

"You thought you had nothing in the world but her that is gone," said the minister, "Isabel! and yet

'ou know who is the light of my eyes, and the desire f my heart?"

She leant her hand again upon the stone, her tears ried, her heart beating, and visibly a crisis before her, hich must affect her whole life.

"I am old enough to be your father," he said, ith his voice trembling. "I never forget that. I've een you grow up bonnie and bright, and loved you more year after year. And now I feel as if I were aking an advantage of my bonnie darling. Isabel, if your life were bright and full of love it would be different. But you are alone. And never man on earth could love you dearer than I do. Will you let me take care of you, my darling?" he cried, and took her hands and gazed into her face. "Will you come to my house and make it glad? I'll be young for my Isabel!" said the minister, with tears in his eyes. And the virgin heart within him came to his face and chased away the years as if by magic. He was kneeling, though he was not aware of it; and his eyes and every line in his countenance were pleading more eloquently than words. But Isabel, in whose heart two rival forces were struggling, was too much agitated and blinded by her own feelings to see.

"Oh, Mr. Lothian, let me go home!" she cried, stumbling to her feet. "How can I think of this— How can I answer you here?"

"You shall answer me where you please," he cried, ising with her, and supporting her with his arms. When you please and where you please, my darling! ut it is here of all places, that I want you to know -Isabel, you *know?*—that there is one that loves you ove *life, above happiness*—more than words can say."

She turned to him for one moment, and gave a sudden, tearful look at his agitated face. "I know, I know!" she cried. "Oh, let me go home, now!"

And he drew her hand within his arm, and took her home, saying not another word. All was said that could be said. It was for her to decide now.

CHAPTER IV.

YET the minister said one more word as he left his love at her own door. He had been debating the question with himself as they crossed the braes, whether he should leave it to her to answer him when she pleased and where she pleased, as he at first said. That was the more generous, the more chivalric way; but Miss Catherine's instructions had not fallen on him in vain. If he left the matter thus, might it not fall again into a vague and general matter as it had done before? Isabel had known of his love years ago, and the consciousness of it had floated about her, sometimes tempting her to be petulant, sometimes to be trustful, but never facing her as a thing which required decision—which had to be renounced or accepted. And the same thing might happen again if he left it in the same way. He took her to her own door without a word more upon this subject of which his heart was full; but ere he left her, he paused a moment, holding her hand in his,—"Isabel," he said, but without looking at her, "if I come to-morrow will you give me my answer?"

Isabel made no reply. She gave him an anxious, timid look, and withdrew her hand, yet lingered upon

hold as if there still might be something to

will come to-morrow for my answer," he re- in a more decided tone. And then the cottage- osed on her, and he went away.

h, is the minister no coming in?" said Jean ell. "Pity me, Isabel, what have ye done to him that was for ever in this house, and now he enters the door?"

have done nothing to him," said Isabel. "What I do to him? I have nothing in my power."

h, lassie, speak the truth!" said Jean. "You el, and a' the Loch kens, that you have mair over him than kith or kin—ay, or the very ery itself. But you're that perverse, ye'll listen ody; and I doubt but ye've been unkind to him, d at him, puir man! and he has nae fault that of but his years."

don't think he is very old," said Isabel, half her breath; and she went away into the little r which he had decorated for her, and sat down window, all alone, without even taking off her . Never before in her life had she been con- of having anything so important to think about. ing had nothing to do with the matter when ton was concerned. It was nothing but a struggle etween her love and grief—between the lover's wishes on one hand, and all the tender decorums all the claims of the past, on the other. She ggled, but she had not required to think. But ere had come such an occasion for thought as d never before known. The question was not inclination or any such urgent motive for or

against as should have settled it for her, without loss of time; on the contrary, it was of the very nature of those questions which demand the clearest thought. Love, as she had apprehended it once, had floated altogether away, she told herself, out of her life. Of that there was to be no more question, either then or for ever; but yet life would not end because it had been thus divested of its highest beauty. And Isabel knew she was young, and felt that she had a long existence before her. Was she to do nothing for the comfort of that existence—nothing to win it out of the mists and dreams? She sat down breathless, her heart heaving with the agitation through which she had lately passed, her nature all astir and moved by a hundred questionings. She did not love Mr. Lothian. Love was over for her—gone out of her life like a tale that is told; but life had to continue all the same: and what kind of life? At the Glebe, with Jean Campbell and the bairns, the only use of her in the world being to make frocks for little Mary, to maintain the family, to keep Jamie at school? And, on the other hand, there was the companionship of a man who loved her—a companionship which was the highest type she knew of, of that highest fellowship which to the simple mind seems always to exist somewhere, could it but be got at. The Manse was the centre of all that stirred in the mind or thoughts of Loch Diarmid. The visitors who came to that lonely solitude found Mr. Lothian out by instinct. He was known over all the country round as "maybe something of an Erastian, but a real clever man." Since the prophets had flitted forth like wandering spirits to the world, he had taken his position again as the leader and head

f the parish; and he loved Isabel. She knew ho
ould surround her with tenderness and care, that
inds of heaven should not breathe roughly on
hat he would set her up high above all cares
roubles, that she would have everything with him
eart could desire—except love. No, she did not
im—never could, never would. For had not
oved already—the one only time of which, in he
nocence, she thought herself capable? and was not
over for ever? Mr. Lothian loved her, though she
ot love him. To have her by him ministering to
ccepting his love and his smile, would make him ha
and it would not make her unhappy that she knev
It would be a better world and a better life.
time of holiday, which was just over, the months
had spent in Edinburgh, with the minister alway
hand and Miss Catherine for her close companion,
been a kind of heaven to Isabel—a sober, quiet,
tral coloured heaven—but yet Paradise itself comp
with the grey, solitary parlour in the Glebe and
Campbell's society. And now she had to choose
tween the two. Her head swam when there occu
to her the recollection of another choice which
might once have made; but pride and pain alike
curred to drive that out of her consideration.
could she think of what might have been? was n
over for ever and ever?

Then she did what, in the circumstances, w
strange thing to do. She went to her room, and
out of the locked drawer, the only one she posse
Stapylton's letter, which had lain there for mo
This letter had experienced a curious fate. Her
movement on reading it had been pain and indign

beyond the power of words to express. She had said to herself that it was an insult, and that the man who could write so to any woman was worthy of no woman's love. But after a while, moved by the hunger in her heart, Isabel had read it over, again and yet again, and had set all her faculties to work, finding meanings for it, and smoothing down the roughnesses until the letter had changed its aspect. And then had come her illness; and the sense of neglect which stung her to the heart, and the careless arms which he seemed to be holding out to her, to come to him if she liked, struck her with all that revulsion of feeling common to the imaginative. It had been put away and there it had lain like the buried body of her old life, awaiting the moment when for resurrection or final burial she should take it forth. It was with a certain sense of solemnity that Isabel approached it now. Her mind was strengthened and refreshed by her absence, her improved health, and the mist which first languor and suffering and then restoration, had thrown over the still recent past. She felt herself able to judge of it freshly as if at first hand, almost impartially; so much had the course of events changed her. And yet the mere effort of taking it out from among the rest of her treasures affected Isabel as she had thought nothing could affect her. She tried to reassure herself, saying that her object was only to read the letter once more, but in her heart felt that she was reopening the entire question, that Stapylton was being put upon his last trial, and that between him and his rival the great final question had been raised at last.

But she could not read it there, nor even in the parlour where there were so many signs of the one

love and none of the other. She went out, for s
still in her walking dress, carrying the letter
hand. No, she could not seat herself under the
tree on the hill and read it there—the spell
associations would have *been too* strong; the ve
the bees among the heather, the rustling
branches, would have spoken to her of him w
met her so often on that spot. Isabel hesitate
moment in doubt, and then she crossed the ro
ascended the hill opposite the cottage. The pl
sought had already grown to be a sacred spo
the country-side. The burn still ran trickli
though the sweet thoughts that once accompa
were still; the rowan hung out its odorous b
over the grassy seat. It was Margaret's little
to which her sister went to think over her fate.

And there she read Stapylton's letter over
Her own mind had advanced, her manners had c
since she read it last. She had grown used
delicate, ever thoughtful tenderness of a man w
only loved her, but was full of old-world, chi
respect for her womanhood and her youth. H
flashed, her whole heart revolted now, as she re
letter. When she had come to the end she
from her like a reptile, and clasped her hands o
face with a sudden thrill of shame that blazed o
like fire. She was ashamed of having inspi
having received, of having ever reconciled
to such an address. What could he have
of her to write to her so?—how could h
dared? Isabel did not know how much h
estimation of herself, and the world, had c
since she read it first. It wrung from her a n

cry of injury and self-disgust. To think that she should have borne it—that she should have spent her tenderest thoughts on a man who was so confident of his power over her, so insulting in his security! The letter lay white on the grass, and the breeze caught it, turned it contemptuously over, and tossed it to the edge of the burn, where it lay dabbling in the soft little current. It was the first thing that caught Isabel's eye as she uncovered her face. No, she could not let it float away on the burn to tell the passers-by how little respect her first love had felt for her. She caught it up fiercely and thrust it back into the envelope, as if the paper itself had harmed her. Her wound was so sharp that the very touch of it seemed to sting her anew. And yet she did not destroy the cruel thing. Her heart ached as if it had been crushed in some one's hand, and two bitter tears welled up into her eyes. But it was his writing, it had come from him, —the last communication between them; though she hated it, and hated him, she could not destroy it. No, no, she said to herself, moaning in her heart, let it remain to humble her if ever again she should be proud, to show what she had been thought capable of. The bitterness of wounded delicacy, mortified pride, and something still more poignant, filled her whole being. She had been loved perhaps, but loved scornfully, loved slightingly. She, who almost up to this moment had been giving unawares, hiding it even from herself, a visionary adoration to the shade of him whom she had concealed in her heart.

And on the other side how different it was! What tender regard, what reverence, she had met with there! *Not* a lad of her own standing, her equal, upon whom

she had all the claim that young love can have; but a man whom, with her own eyes, she had seen taking a place of honour among his fellows. Yet he was ready to be her attendant wherever she went, to make her his companion in everything, consulting her, deferring to her; taking her likings, her tastes, every indication of her timid will, for something sacred. Once more Isabel's heart expanded, her lips quivered, a gleam, half of pleasure, half of scorn, flickered over her face. If she could but have shown *him*—him who had ventured to invite her to meet him, to make her own way to his careless arms—that a better man than himself waited her pleasure, watched to see her will in her eyes, served her as a pilgrim does his saint! It did not strike Isabel that this was but a poor motive for accepting Mr. Lothian's love. It was the natural suggestion of her own young heart intolerant of slight or pain. Oh, what a difference there was! To be addressed in those light words, to be required to make the sacrifice of everything sacred in her life, of all her associations, everything personal to herself; and for what? An insulting fondness when she was with him, and such indifference when she was absent that he would leave her to pine for months without a word; to lose her courage and heart, and almost her wits, sitting lonely waiting for him in her solitude and sorrow under the trysting-tree. And the other, who had never forsaken her, who had thought not of himself, but of her—who was offering her all the results of his life, his tender heart to shield her, his wisdom to guide her, the honour and high regard he had won for himself, to be ornaments to her—the prospect of all this ought *to have lit up Isa*bel's face and made her proud.

But instead it only bent her head into her covering hands once more and called forth a silent flood of tears. "Oh, Horace, Horace!" she murmured; oh, if it had but been he and not the other! And yet she hated him, and would have thrust him from her had he appeared at that moment; and held that other as high above him as heaven is over the earth.

After this conflict she went silently home, holding Stapylton's letter in her hand. She did not put it even in her pocket as a thing belonging to her; but held it, wetted by the burn, listlessly in her hand. Yet she put it back once more into the locked drawer. It was one of her possessions still, no more to be parted with than any other legacy of her past life. It was still afternoon, and the broad bright summer sunshine lay over the Loch. Isabel sat down at her parlour window, listless and alone. She was tired with her walk, and had "no object," as her stepmother said, in going out again. She could not now wander about the braes as she had once done. There was a heap of work lying on the table, domestic mending and making, chiefly for herself; but she could not sit down to that silent occupation at a moment when all the wheels of life were standing still, with an expectant jar and thrill, to await the least movement of her finger. She took a book at first; but her own thoughts and her own situation were more interesting than any book. Then she gazed out, without well knowing what she saw—but by degrees, her perceptions quickening, became aware that Miss Catherine's boat, with its bright cushions, was gliding out from the beach opposite Lochhead. It was a boat which could be identified at once from all the coarser forms on the Loch. The

re ladies in it,—young ladies, as Isabel felt. Th
t stood out shining on the silvery sunshiny wate
h its shadow as vivid below as was the substan
ve. That was how life went for the others—a li
hin Isabel's reach so near that she could touch
h her finger. It seemed to her that she could he
ir voices and laughter while she sat alone. Th
re going up Tam-na-hara, the highest hill on Lo
rmid, to judge by the direction they were taking-
rry party, with the sunshine flooding all rou
n and their joyful way. And Isabel had not ev
n told, knew nothing about it; she who would ha
n one of the first to be consulted had her hor
n at the Manse instead of at the Glebe. M
herine had been very good to her in Edinburg
l made an equal of her. But here, what was sh
he Captain's Isabel—half-peasant, half gentlewom
Jean Campbell's stepdaughter and companion; r
h enough for the ladies and gentlemen, too high
ontent with "common folk."

When the boat disappeared out of sight, Isal
k up some of the work that lay on her table. H
ven been work for the children there might ha
n some sort of consolation in it; but it was for h
She seemed to be shut up in a little round
ding in herself—the grey walls her only surrour
s—this homely household her only sphere. At
n came to the door and called her to tea. T
ldren were seated at their porridge, Margaret's ch
l been carefully put out of the way, and Isabel
rn on her stepmother's other side, to the curic
sposite meal. She was not disposed to listen, l
n was as little disposed to be silent.

"Mary's been complaining of her head," she said; "I think I'll no send her to the school the morn; maybe you would give her a bit lesson, Isabel, out of one of your books, as you used to do. There's measles about the Loch. I dinna like to expose her at the school."

"Very well—if she likes," said Isabel.

"Na, we'll no ask her what *she* likes. Jamie's been keepit in again the day. If I was Mr. Galbraith, I'd find some means of making a callant work better than aye keeping him in. Losh, I would think shame to be mastered by a wean! And you, ye muckle haverel, why should I be at a' the trouble, and Isabel at a' the expense, keeping ye at the school when ye learn nothing? Laddie, ye've nae ambition. If Mary had been the lad and you the lass—"

"I wouldna be a lassie to be the Queen," said Jamie in indignation.

"I can do a' his lessons better than he can," cried little Mary; "I never was keepit in in my life. I'm aye dux, and he's booby—!"

"Whisht! whisht! and no quarrel," said Jean. "There's company at Lochhead, Isabel. Nae doubt that's the reason Miss Catherine has never been here. But she might have sent for ye when there were young folk about. I'm no meaning a word against you, my bonnie woman; but you were aye a hasty bit thing, and strangers dinna ken the warm heart that's wi' it. It's vexed me, the minister no coming in. You've been taking affronts, Isabel, at them; or some of your pride-fu' ways; they were a' a great deal mair here in the auld time——"

"It was for another, and not for me," said Isab
a sudden humiliation.
"I'm no saying that," said Jean; "but ony w
re's a change. I have my ain pride, though I'
a cotter's daughter myself. And you've mair rig
it, that are a lady born. But if you'll no take
ss, Isabel, a young lass like you shouldna show
the like of them. They're no used to it. A
ugh you've good blood in your veins, you're no ju
same as Miss Catherine; and it canna be a sm
g that's turned the minister that he wouldna cor

"There might be other reasons for that," said Is
under her breath.
"What are ye saying? The man has worshipp
very ground ye trod on since you were little old
a Mary," said Jean seriously; "I'm no saying
erstand it for my part. He's aulder than me—a
re me fashing my head about a young lad! But
wearies at the last it can only have been yo
me."
"I think it would be best not to speak of su
gs," said Isabel, with some heat, "before t
ms."
"Maybe you're right there," Jean muttered, aft
moment's pause. And then she resumed, "Mar
'll get your seam if there's nae lessons to be learn
ight,—unless Isabel gives you some of her poet
nd, Jamie, get you your books. If you're diligen
be Isabel will gie ye a hand. Poor thing!" s
l to herself, as she turned away to put her room
r after the meal, "it's the best thing I can do f
—better than sitting hand idle and no a creatu

to speak to her. If she were a lass that could go service, or even that could stir about the house. I her that was never brought up to do anything, an lady born!"

And thus Isabel sat while the long evening linge prolonging the day to an extent of which only a n thern day is capable. The light stole out of the sk with a dying fall like a strain of music. Once or tw she rose and went to the open door, and gazed wistful upon the silvery evening tones, the soft shad and softer lights. A night in June, not such a glow June as even that of England, no parched nor su heat in the earth, but all coolness, softness, fragra light on the horizon, light on the loch, lingering wooing all the hollows among the hills; it was suc bridal of the earth and sky as morning could sc equal—a bridal and a parting at once, sweet sor full of returns and lingerings, and a hundred last wo At such a moment it is doubly hard to be alone. bel went to the door, and stood there with all the fume of the night breathing about her; fragrance f the firs, from the young birches, from the hone whins all aglow upon the hill, from the bog-my that filled every corner; and sighed—what could do but sigh? And then went in to sit again with children, and hear the murmur of their lesson-learn The monotonous sound drove her to her parlou take refuge there. She sat at the window and wat the lingering of the last lights upon the Loch, and the boat come home with the Tam-na-hara party, heard some of them singing in the stillness, and dip of the oars in the silvery water. The water shone, retaining the last reflexion of the day;

within the little grey parlour all was dark. A h
ical gasp came into Isabel's throat as she sat
thought of all the brightness life had for these ot
and its tedium for herself. How could she go on li
with this routine and no other to occupy existe
What was life worth under such circumstances? It
cruel of Miss Catherine, after all she had done for
to cut her off now so completely from all share in
was going on. But that was not the immediate
tion. Nobody on Loch Diarmid could ignore her,
body could forget her existence, if she were Mr. Loth
wife; and he loved her—and it would be a diff
world to Isabel when it was at the Manse windo
watched the falling evening. Had she seen the
ister at that moment mounting the brae, Isabel sa
herself she would have hailed him as a messeng
light. He would have come in and dispelled the
notony with his talk of everything that was goin
outside, with all the many ways he had, as she
discovered, of interesting and lighting up the wor
her. He knew so much more, and had seen so
more, than she had. And if she would thus wel
him as a chance visitor, would not the greetin
happier still if she were his wife watching fo
coming home? A little nervous shudder crept ove
as she sat in the dark looking out upon the pale
mer of the Loch, and upon the sky where the d
light seemed to tremble in the mystic northern twil
as if gathering its strength to burst forth again
he shadow of the momentary night. And then
gore she hid her face in her hands and murmur
er heart a name which was not Mr. Lothian's n
h, no! no! she did not love that other! he who

loved her so lightly, left her so cruelly, written to her so slightingly! But oh, why was it not he who was so good, who was so tender and true, who was waiting for her answer? That was the question she was asking herself vainly, and to which no kindly spirit could give any reply.

The next morning, when Isabel was putting her books in order, and wiping the dust from the shelves he had put up for her, and pleading his cause to herself, Miss Catherine suddenly appeared at the Glebe. A more unexpected visitor could scarcely have been, and for the moment Isabel was disposed to be stately and affronted. Miss Catherine paused, almost before she spoke, to look round and observe the change in the room. She shook her head as she kissed Isabel. "Poor man!" she said; "poor man! that's what his wisdom suggested to him. To make your own house pleasant and cheery when he should have thought of nothing but tempting you to his." This was a sufficient indication of her mission. She sat down steadily with the air of establishing herself for serious work, and pointed Isabel to a seat near her. "My dear, sit down; I have a great deal to say to you," she said; and the girl's impatient temper fired at once.

"Whatever you have to say, Miss Catherine, it can surely be said while I am doing my work," she said, turning to her books. But she was held by the glittering eye which her old friend, half contemptuous of her petulance, fixed upon her, and after a vain attempt to continue her occupation, turned round and dropped into the indicated place. "You have not said anything yet," said Isabel, but with a feeling that already she was having the worst.

"I might speak to my housemaid while she was dusting," said Miss Catherine, "but not to you, Isabel Diarmid. I have come to ask you but one question, my dear. Are you going to be a reasonable creature, and make yourself and an honest man happy? or do you mean to deliver yourself over to weariness and this do-nothing life?"

"I have plenty to do," said Isabel, startled, but without sufficient presence of mind to answer anything but the first natural scrap of self-defence on which she could lay her hand.

"It is not true, Isabel; you have nothing to do worthy a young woman of good connexions by the mother's side, as you are. And when you have better in your power, and a life that is worth your while, and a man that is fond of you, do you mean to tell me you will throw them all away?"

"Miss Catherine," said Isabel, almost crying, "you have been very kind; but I don't know why you should question me like this. At home I am not so good as you; you don't care to come to see me or take notice of me. Why should you take any interest in me now?"

"Well, you may say it is him I take an interest in," said Miss Catherine, dryly. "If you are affronted, Isabel, as you appear to be, I am come to tell you what will happen if you send him away again as you did before, and take no courage to look into your own heart. Are you happy without him? If it comes to be that he will never pass this road again, never enter this room, nor take more interest in you, will that be *a pleasant ending in your eyes?*"

Isabel made no answer; she only turned her head away, with flushed cheeks and averted looks.

"For, don't deceive yourself," said Miss Catherine, "that would be the result. He may have been weak, but he has always been able to hope; but if you say "No" now, there will be no middle course for him. If he puts himself in your way again, I, for one, will wash my hands of him; and I will never do anything to throw him in your way. Do you understand what I mean?"

"Yes, I understand," cried the girl; "but if you think—if you think—I am to be threatened——! Miss Catherine, you have been very kind; but you are not my mother, or my near friend, to meddle with me now."

"But I *will* meddle," said Miss Catherine, "and for your good. Will you part with him and me, and all that is best near you, for a dream—a delusion—a fancy of your bit foolish heart? Or will you accept a happy life and a good man, and all that heart can desire, when Providence offers them to you, Isabel?—that is what I have come to ask. And I'll not go till I get my answer. I was fond of your mother, and fond of Margaret, and I am fond of you," said the old lady, with softening eyes. "My dear, I would give a good year of my life to see you so safe landed. They are gone that would have advised you better than me. But I cannot stand by and let you throw your life away. It would be a happy, good life. You would be like the apple of his eye. He loves you like the men in books—like the men in your poetry you're so fond of, him and you. If I were as young as you, and my life in my own hands again!——But when I was

our age I was a fool;—will you be like all the res
s, and choose your own dream, and let your life
y?"

"Were the rest like that?" said Isabel, sudde
using up, with white lips and troubled eyes, to g
t her monitor, who had thus changed her tone al
ce.

"I could tell you stories of that," said Miss Cather
ddenly taking the girl's hand into her own, "
me day I may. But there is no time for that n
abel, will you think well, and ponder what I sa

"I am dizzy with thinking," said Isabel, puti
r hand to her head, with a certain despair.

"Then think no more," said Miss Catherine, "
ke what God sends you. He must not find me h
would never forgive me. Isabel, me, that was y
ther's friend, I bid you make that man happy,
t sin against your own life. He'll come befor
n get away. God bless you, bairn," said M
therine, hurriedly kissing her, "and don't fo
hat I say."

CHAPTER V.

Miss Catherine's words had scarcely died ou
bel's ear when the minister himself stood at
r.

She was standing where her kinswoman had
—standing in front of the window, where the l
full upon her face and figure, her hands held so
ther, her eyes full of uncertainty and anx
ght. When Mr. Lothian came in, she raised t
m with a dumb entreaty, which went to his he

He had come to have an answer to his love-suit; and she who had to decide it stood gazing at him, praying him meekly to tell her what to do and what to say!

He came forward at that appeal, and took her hands into his.

"Isabel," he said, with a voice full of emotion, "must I leave it over till another time, and come back when you have made up your mind? My darling, you are not to make yourself unhappy for me."

"Oh, no, no," she said, half sobbing; "I cannot tell what to do. Tell me what to do. It is you that know best."

And once more she raised her eyes to her lover—humble, beseeching, asking his counsel. Surely never man was in so strange a dilemma before. He made a little pause to master himself; he made an effort to throw off from him his natural interest in his own suit. He looked at her, into her beseeching eyes, to see her heart through them, if that might be. His voice sunk to the lowest passionate tones.

"Isabel," he said, clasping her hand so closely that he hurt her, "do you love *him* still?"

Then there came a cry as of a dumb creature, and big tears rolled up into her eyes.

"No!" she said, gazing at him with those two liquid globes—dark, unfathomable seas, in which all his skill and wisdom failed. It seemed to him as if she had, by some craft of nature, veiled the eyes which he might have divined, with the unshed tears which he could not divine.

"You only can tell," he cried, losing such semblance as he had of calm—"you only can tell! Isabel, do you love him still?"

"No!" she repeated, with more energy; "no, Oh, no—never again!" and let the tears drop, and looked at him softly, with her eyes unclouded.

"Then come to me!" he said, almost with violence, letting her hands fall and holding out his arms to her.

She paused; a flood of colour rushed over her face, that had been so pale. Her eyes fell before his. She held out to him the two hands he had loosed his hold of, and put them into his. It was not such love as he had dreamed. His heart, that was so young and full of fire, ached with the pang of the almost disappointment, though it was better to him than any other satisfaction. She gave herself to him sweetly, gently, with a soft, virginal calm.

"Yes," she said under her breath, "if you will take me—this way—if you are content——"

"My dear, my dear, more than content!" he cried, his heart beating with love and joy, and disappointment, and mortification, and happiness. She was so gently acquiescent, so calm, so—resigned—yes, that was the word; while he was full of all a young man's fervour and passion. And yet, at last, she was his, and it was sweet. When he left her he did his best to school himself in the tumult of his emotions. Was it not always so? Could one mortal creature ever fully satisfy another at that supreme moment and junction of two lives? Was there not ever too little or too much —a failure from the perfect dream, the unspeakable union? But she was his all the same—to be cherished, cared for, made happy—she who was so unfriended. About that side of the matter there would be no doubt; and she would consent to his happiness, acquiesce in it, *smile with soft wonder at* his passion. Well, after

Isabel, for her part, was very giddy when it was all over, and felt like a creature in a dream. When she stood up the light seemed to swim away from her eyes, and a blackness came over the world. Something sang and buzzed in her ears; strange colours seemed to creep over the Loch and prismatic reflexions. But yet amid all the bewilderment and confusion was a sense of comfort that it was settled at last. She had no more need to question with herself,—no effort to make after a decision; a sense of quiet stole into her soul, the storm was over, and she had reached the haven. Whatever the future might be, at least its foundation was laid, its keynote struck. When she came to herself a little, though she asked no such questions of it as her lover did, that future seemed to stretch out long and calm before her, with no agitations in it. Her thoughts, as she looked to it, were very subdued; not rapturous, like his. It was a new world to her, but yet a grey world, level, and even, and calm, and smooth, with none of the flushings of youthful delight about its quiet horizon. And somewhere, hidden out of the way, she was just aware of a little secret ache in her heart. But, still it was all settled, that was the great matter; and he was so good, and tender, and true. And it would be a life among her equals, among her fellows; not a helpless drifting ashore, as was her fate now. The worst was that it looked so long—so long: an infinite of existence without any visible end. She did not think of the twenty years which the minister might still have before him; though even twenty years to Isabel looked more like an eternity than a measured bit of time—but of indefinite duration, *long beyond the reach of* thought; so long, so serene,

so subdued in tone, that the stretch of grey distance made her sigh. And yet it was a right thing she had done. She was glad that it was over; and felt herself grow dizzy when she rose up; and had something singing in her ears; and sighed; and yet was content.

That was an exciting day at the Glebe. Miss Catherine returned in the afternoon in the carriage, which was a rare grandeur, and kissed Isabel, and blessed her. She had gained her purpose, and it was no longer needful to shut the girl out from her house and her life. As the first symptom of the great change over, she carried Isabel off in the carriage to join the visitors at Lochhead; and it was Miss Catherine, who intimated the great news to Jean, who had been much startled and mystified by the commotion in the house, though without any very clear idea what it meant. It was an intimation, not without its importance to Jean, and took away her breath; but she received it with a stoical concealment of her own individual feelings, with a few tears, and a shower of good wishes. "And me that was finding fault with Isabel because the minister wouldna come in!" she said, with an unsteady laugh. Jenny Spence arrived on a visit to the kitchen just as the carriage drove off, and she, too, as was natural, came in for her share of the tidings. They were the first in the parish who knew of it, and that in itself was no small distinction. But the news itself was too exciting to require any enhancement of circumstance. The two friends drew their chairs to the kitchen-fire as soon as the carriage was out of sight. They had watched it to the turn of the road, dazzled by the splendour. The children were out, and all was still in the house except the ticking of the clock, the inevitable

sehold heart. And in the languor of the lo
ny afternoon, they drew near, with true peasant
erence to the changes of the season, to the cle
cheerful hearth. The fire scorched them, but th
re no heed to that, any more than they gave he
n the cold wind swept through them as they stc
heir doors. Such vicissitudes of cold and heat w
idents to be submitted to, not things which ma
y difference to the indispensable routine of life.

"If Margaret had foreseen it she would have ma
e kind of a will," said Jean, confidentially, o
fire. "Mr. Lothian, he's real weel off, and th
uldna miss it. But ye can ne'er tell what a m
y do; they like to have a' in their ain hands. A
n he may tak' his ain notions about Jamie; they
awfu' full o' their opinions and their ain way.
for myself, for I've aye had it before my e'en th
ner or later, I would have to work for my brea
l Jean, lightly raising a corner of her apron to l
s; "but I had aye set my heart on breeding
mie——and him the Captain's son."

"It's an awfu' pity," said her sympathetic frie
at it didna happen in Margaret's time."

"I might have kent it would happen," said Je
t I was aye feared for that English lad, and w
ent he would have nae consideration; but Mr. I
n was another thing. Eh! to think of a man
years being that taken up with a bonnie face!
er can understand thae men."

"They're a' the same," said Jenny; "gie them
of twenty and they ask for nae mair; but Isa
o a common lass. I wouldna wonder at the m
made a fool of himself for the like of her."

"Woman, it's no that!" said Jean, "but he might be her faither. Eh, if us women were as foolish! Let alone the like of us—if Miss Catherine now was to take up with a man twenty years younger than herself!"

"Miss Catherine's awfu' masterful and fond of her ain way," said Jenny, with indignation; "but ye ken little about her, Jean Campbell, if ye would even her to the like of that."

"Isna that just what I'm saying?" said Jean. "Figure her, or figure me, Jenny Spence, that am a widow woman—and eh, the cry that would be raised! There's no a man in the parish but would have his word on the silly woman; but it's no silly in the man. A young lass that wasna born when he ought to have gotten a wife! but it's a' right when it's a man."

"They ken we've mair sense," said Jenny.

"And we would just need to have mair sense! Here have I my bairns to think of, and how they're to be bred, and where the siller's to come from—and yonder is yon man, that is half as auld again, and has nae thing better in his head but making love and speakin nonsense to a young lass! I would think shame—an him the minister! But it's my opinion that ministers are nae better than ither men."

"It's no for folk like you and me, that are professing Christians, to say sae," said Jenny; "the lads are aye ready enough to talk. But Mr. Lothian's real good man, let other ministers be what they will He'll no be hard on you nor Jamie neither. I would trust him with gold untold if it was me."

"But no to give up his ain way of thinking," said Jean. "Na, woman, that's what I am feared for

He'll have Jamie to the Manse and examine him, as they call it. And the callant will get frightened and forget what he should say; and then Mr. Lothian will come to me, and maybe the Dominie, and they'll say, "He's a good callant and a braw callant, and will do very well behind the plough; but as for bringing him up to be a minister, Mrs. Diarmid—" they'll say, "I wouldna think mair of that."

"And if it's true," said Jenny, "it would be the best thing for both Jamie and you."

"But it's no true," said Jean; "and I'll no have it true," she added, "no if a' the ministers in the world were to swear it. Do you think I dinna ken my ain laddie the best?"

Meanwhile Isabel, with her head swimming, had gone back to the other sphere for which she had sighed, and found herself the object of a thousand little regards and observations. Miss Catherine, after her neglect, did not seem able to do enough to show her affection; and ere long the minister, now no longer her friend and adviser, but her lover and affianced husband, joined the party. The sight of him had the most curious effect on Isabel; she was immediately covered, as by a shield, from Miss Catherine's too demonstrative satisfaction, from the overwhelming comments of the others; but for herself her head swam more than ever, and the solid earth seemed to have grown unsteady under her feet. She was in a dream; not such a sweet dream as he was walking about in, his head in the clouds; and not painful either, as one doomed and going to the sacrifice. It was only confusion—a mist which she could not penetrate—something *which blurred all the* outlines and confounded

one object with another. She kept apart, and kept silent, feeling that if she spoke she would be incoherent, and if she moved might totter. It was all so new. When she had time to use herself to "what had happened," things would be different; such, at least, was what she said to herself.

But things were very little different until the wedding took place, which was a few days after the completion of the year of mourning for her sister. During the interval she scarcely ever regained her balance. She was as composed as usual, and took everything with outward calm; but she did not know what she was doing. The notes of her being were jangled out of tune—not harshly, but vaguely. The effect upon her was not to distort, but to dim everything. The world became vague, and all that was in it. It did not seem to her that she was to begin only a new chapter of existence; but that a new book, mysterious and strange, lay before her, beyond the crisis which she slowly approached. There was a little fear of it, a little longing to have it over—sometimes a sick weariness of everything in her mind; but the days passed, and the weeks, and the ordinary preparations were made, and no one knew how far out of the ordinary were her thoughts. And at last the day came; a September day, early in the month, when the heather had just died out of bloom, and the crack of the sportsman's gun was heard on the hills. There was no church-going procession, no pretty stream of bridal maidens from the Glebe to the church. The marriage took place in the little grey parlour, with the decorations in it which the bridegroom had put up, and with the associations that were so sacred to both. They stood

where Margaret's sofa had stood, where she had
and were made man and wife. And when it was
and had become irrevocable the bride woke up w
little cry—the mist vanished from her eyes and
saw things clear;—a cloud of interested, smiling
around her, a man by her side who was her husb
— the new life, no longer a matter of the future,
present, had begun.

"Did you speak, my darling?" said her new
band, drawing her arm through his, and lookin
her with the ineffable satisfaction in his eyes of a
who had attained all his desires, and reached the
mit of content.

Isabel gazed up at him, attracted and touche
spite of herself by that wonderful look of happi
scarcely able to refrain from being glad for him,
withstanding the sharp and new impression of re
which weighed so strangely on herself. "I n
thought it would come true," she sighed, turning
head away with momentary petulance, and burst
uncontrollable tears.

The bystanders were too much interested in
bride to notice if any cloud passed over the mini
face. Had there been so, it would have been foo
for was it not to be expected that a bride the mo
she was married should signalise that wonderful e
by the most natural sign of emotion? It was but
every one looked for, an almost duty of her posi
The women took her from her husband and kissed
blessed and cried over her in their turn. "And
bother to support her at sic a time," the humbler
king guests said to each other as they stood abou
door. There were two lines of sympathetic gazer

round the post-chaise when it came to take the bridal pair away; fashion was not urgent on that point on Loch Diarmid—but Mr. Lothian, with all the poetry of youth still in him, was eager to carry his love away and have her all to himself. She was very pale and trembled excessively as she was led out of her father's house; but at last she had fully awakened out of all her dreamings, and felt the force of the change she had made. And Isabel did not turn from, but to, her husband in that dangerous crisis of her being. Whatever might happen, she was conscious that he was her support and comforter. She put her hand into his trustfully, and went away—not happy as he was, yet at peace. Into the long summer stretch of life, the existence without passion, without suffering, that lay before her now all was over; taking farewell—was it for ever?—of the cottage in which she had been born.

CHAPTER VI.

THE wedding tour was but a short one; and when the snow appeared on the hills in October, and the early winter began to isolate Loch Diarmid from the rest of the world, Isabel stood by the Manse window as she had pictured herself standing, and looked for her husband coming home. She had dreamed of it all; and somehow, out of a dream it had come to a reality, and she found herself in the very position she had imagined, still somewhat wistful, but no longer sad, or distracted by any of the doubts of the past. It would be impossible to say how good he was to her as good as a good man of the most generous and de

lisate instincts could be to a young creature whor
loved with all his heart, and with a certain touc
compunction and compassion, and a ghost of rem
mingling in his love. He was not, he knew, the
of man she should have married; he was old enc
to be her father; and the consciousness gave to
love a soft delicacy, and reverence, and tender
which are rare in the world. Had she been unrea
able he would have made himself a very slave to
caprices; but Isabel was not unreasonable. She
even yet a little timid of expressing her own wish
opinions. It had been a great struggle to her to
him by his Christian name, and to recognise the
that he was brought to her level, or she to his.
gradually she accustomed herself to it. And as
mate of a man so much older than herself by deg
learned to put on that soft dignity, that inno
transparent assumption of age and sobriety, w
makes the young wife of a middle-aged man look
older, but younger still, though she herself th
otherwise. She put a little cap over her pretty
to look more like the minister's wife. She wore sc
coloured dresses, quiet shawls, played at being her
grandmother, as became (she thought) her posi
And succeeded, by so doing, in looking more fair, r
youthful, more quaintly poetic and girlish, than be
But the device pleased herself. And she found
self launched into society,—such society as is p
sible on Loch Diarmid. Miss Catherine's carr
conveyed her to dinner at all the "good" houses in
neighbourhood. She had good blood by her motl
side, as everybody knew; and when she ceased t
be Captain's Isabel and became Mrs. Lothian,

was no longer dangerous in her beauty to the yc Lairdlings of these parts, the Loch, and even country, rose up to do her honour. The aristocrac Lochshire was not remarkable for any great intelle qualities any more than other rural aristocra neither was it the highest possible school of man and social grace. But yet it was a great advanc Isabel of the Glebe Cottage, who had no trainin the ways of the world. She was a lady born, as Campbell, with pride, had so often asserted; and gentle blood, or the gentle mind, or both, asse themselves. Imperceptibly the change crept Isabel. Mr. Lothian was "well connected" in his person, and he was well off, having had somethin begin upon, and so many years of frugal bachelor to provide him with means for the gratification o young wife. And Miss Catherine, proud of her *tégée* and of the match she had made, superinte Isabel's toilette, and watched over her comings goings. So that the winter passed away in a plea flutter of social occupation, and the new Mrs. Lot had such share of *succès* as is agreeable to a yc wife setting out upon the world.

But yet, on the whole, what she preferred was long winter nights when she watched for her husb coming home by the waning twilight, and sat d with him at the table to which her own hands had a what decoration was possible. If her eyes did light up at his approach, they yet smiled softly on with that serenity which was so new to hasty Isa She was glad when he liked his dinner, and liste with a sweet impartial satisfaction while he praised dishes she had ordered for him, and sometimes he

prepare, and her own blooming looks. She "t
kiss sedately," not more moved by it than she
the whisper into her ear that the tea was ready,
pretty housemaid, whom she had known all
And then the Dominie would stray in and
it his gaunt length in one of the easy-chairs by
wing-room fire, and the two men would talk of
y knew, and all they had seen, and all they thou
le she sat working between them, saying now a
n her half-dozen words, listening with all the fr
osity of her age. Her husband would pause n
l then to explain to her some special subject of
rse, and Isabel would listen, smiling, looking
n her work. At first she had said, "Never mi
ke best to find it out from what you say; I l
hear what Mr. Galbraith thinks, and what
k, and put them together." But Mr. Lothian
satisfied with that. If he had a weakness, it
instruct his wife, and make her understand eve
g he was interested in. And he was a little ve
t he could not persuade her, as he said, "to tak
t." But that was a slight,—a very slight vexati
d Isabel did not care to take a part. She listen
l she pursued her own thoughts; and sometimes
f heard the talk, thinking of how to plant a n
ver-bed as spring was coming, or whether lit
y would not be better for a new frock; or how
nge the ladies and the gentlemen at the gr
ner-party which she was shortly to give in return
civilities of the Loch. Her mind went away,
upon all those matters of fact which it is one
st effects of marriage to render delightful to
g woman, especially if her heart is not very p

foundly moved by any *grande passion*. All uncertainties, all dreams, were over for ever. The wide, vague horizon of youth was shut in within certain unchangeable limits. No one and no thing could now come over the hills to change her fate. That was fixed, and she was softly contented and happy. Sometimes it even occurred to her to think that one of the great advantages of being married was this contentment with external things. These had become the real things—the dinners, and the servants, and her husband's crimped frills and shirt-buttons, and the arrangements of the house. As for the fancies and dreams of old, they were over along with her youth; and the speculations in which "these two" were indulging, were they not partly a sign of a want on their part of something active to do? If the men could have that pleasant weight of the dinner on their shoulders, or were obliged to see that everything went smoothly, without break or interruption in the house, or even to hem and crimp and keep in perfect order these cambric ruffles! Then she would glance at her husband, who was looking at her with his eyes so full of love. His hair was getting white, it was true; but then his cheek was still like a rose, and was set off by the white hair. And Isabel's eye dwelt admiringly on the ruffles which she had hemmed, which she had crimped, and in which she had placed the little pin she had given him when they were married. It was not a very valuable ornament. It was a small oblong brooch, set round with pearls, which she had herself worn with Margaret's hair in it, as long as she could remember. Now it held a little curl of her own intertwined with Margaret's, and had been placed on a pin

to fit it for its present use. It was the only ornament of the kind the minister ever wore. And it was Isabel herself who had to put it into the delicate cambric every morning. He was so particular about his frills. And she was proud of them, and let no hand touch them but her own.

This was the very centre of her quiet, unemotional happiness. The fire-light and the pretty bright glow of the lamp, and Mr. Lothian and the Dominie talking, arguing, commenting upon everything, while she sat, half listening, hemming her cambric. It was not necessary to her comfort to have her husband to herself. There were no little outbursts of feeling one way or another to make the presence of a third party disagreeable. The wedded calm of life, silencing all vexing thoughts, putting all uncertainties to flight, composing her mind to unexciting prose and matter of fact, had come upon Isabel. She had not a doubt that it was always so, and the quiet had even a good moral effect upon her, subduing her hasty petulance and impetuosity of temper. The wedding had been a shock to her, as it is to most young women; but when she became used to herself in her new character, the repose and the safety stole into her soul. She was happy during that winter, as perhaps she had never been before in her life. Happy in her house, in her ruffles, in her dinner-parties, in the sense of importance, and use, and dignity; and happy in her husband, too, very affectionate to him, as his daughter might have been, though scarcely so familiar as would have become a daughter; and glad of the Dominie to come in of nights and talk, and leave her free for her hemming, to listen a little if she *liked*. *This was* how the winter went by.

And when spring came a great idea had developed in Mr. Lothian's mind. He had been thinking of it all the time, though he had said nothing. It was to take his wife to London, to see everything that could be seen, to go to the theatre, and the opera, and make acquaintance with the big world. It took away Isabel's breath when the suggestion was made to her. Going to London to her was something like what going to Constantinople would be to a young woman in her position now—only so much more dazzling and splendid to think of. When Jean Campbell heard of it, it brought tears of pride to her eyes. "Eh, Isabel, my bonnie woman, ye have a life like a fairy tale!" she cried, and such was the effect produced upon the Loch in general by the news of this wonderful project.

"His young wife has turned his head," said John Macwhirter. "There's nae fool like an auld fool, especially when there's a wife in the case."

"If it had been in to the Assembly in May, ane could understand," said old Sandy Diarmid, "to see the Lord Commissioner and a' the sights; but London's a different story. It would suit him better to save his siller for the family, when they come."

"But I hear there's nae word of a family," said another gossip, "and he has been saving since ever he came to the parish. So long as the pulpit's well supplied I see nae harm in't for my part."

At the village doors the question was still more hotly discussed.

"Set her up with her trips to London!" cried one of the neighbours, "and her only Duncan Diarmid's daughter, as we a' ken, and with nae right to such extravagance."

t by the mother's side Isabel's a lady born," enny Spence, "and her father was an officer, d as young Kilcranion, that you think so much hen ye marry an auld man ye may well expect nsideration at the least. A' he can do is but r bonnie Isabel."

they were to spend the siller on God's service ld set them better—and him a minister," said White.

d in higher circles there were a good many and gentle jokes about the minister's uxorious s. Even Miss Catherine was not quite sure uch an extravagant notion. But all the criticism affect Mr. Lothian. He had made all his plans, anged everything without regard to the popular . "I mean my Isabel to see everything, and verything I can give her," he said. He had n that mysterious world himself when he was He had been tutor to the Marquis, the tutelary f the district, who came to church always when on the Loch, and had the minister to dine with d showed him every sort of attention. London such wonder and enigma to him as it was to f his parishioners. And Isabel, for the first time her marriage, was moved with an excitement almost renewed her impetuosity. The thought ng "to England" stirred up all her dormant s for pleasure. She made him tell her all about ere they should go; what the Park was like the ladies rode; if he was sure it was quite right to a theatre—and a hundred other particulars; ien at last the moment came for setting out, the

young creature almost threw off her wifely gravity an felt herself a girl again.

They went by sea, which was a somewhat awf experience; but yet, when she had recovered the fir frightful consequences of acquaintance with the unstead waters, even the fact of "the voyage" added somethin to Isabel's sense of growing experience and knowled of life. She walked about the deck, leaning on h husband's arm as the steamer went up the peaceab Thames, quite recovered from all unpleasant sensation and full of bright wonder and curiosity. "You kno everything as if you had lived here all your life," sl said, in unfeigned admiration for her husband's cleve ness, and hung upon him asking a thousand question pleased with all the novelty about her, proud of h unbounded information, a sweeter picture he thoug than all London besides could produce.

"I was here when I was young like you," he sai "when everything takes hold of one's mind—when did not know I was to be so happy as to bring n bonnie Isabel. I suppose it was before you we born."

"And perhaps you were thinking of some oth Isabel," she said, looking up in his face, with t laughing half-jealousy of the wife, a something mo like love and less like simple affection (he though than he had seen in her before.

"Never," he said, bending down over the swe face that was his own, "my darling, I never love woman till I saw you. And when I saw you, yo were no woman, but a child. I kept my heart youn for you, Isabel."

She gave him a wondering glance, and then a litt

flush came over her face, and she turned to ask him a question about something else which struck her on the other side of the river. She had not kept her heart fresh for him. She felt, with a momentary sense of guiltiness, that they were not equal on that point. But her very thoughts were as innocently and simply true to him now as if he had been—her father. Something like this was what Isabel thought, but not with any conscious sense that her love for her husband should have been different. She was quite happy standing there with her hand drawn closely within his arm, proud of him and of everything about him, from his boundless knowledge down to his spotless ruffles; and felt at the present moment no need of anything else for the happiness of her life.

And Isabel enjoyed all the sights of London with the same proud satisfaction. He could tell her about everything, from Westminster and St. Paul's down to the old gentlemen riding in the Row, among whom he pointed out to her the Duke and Sir Robert Peel, and at least a dozen more, as if he had known them all his life, she said to herself. He was not so learned in respect to the ladies, it was true. But still to know so much was a great thing. And then it made his wife so independent. She had no need to ask, to consult books, to remain in ignorance of anything. It gave her the sweetest sense of superiority when she met a young country lady in the Row with her husband who was not so clever as the minister, and saw them gaze and gape at the notabilities. "Mr. Lothian will tell you who they are," said Isabel, proudly. And when her countrywoman confided to her how little she knew *about the places she had* seen, the gratification of the

minister's wife grew stronger and stronger. "Mr. Lothian was here when he was young," she said; "and I never need to ask anybody but him—he knows everything."

"Here when he was young, indeed!" young Mrs. Diarmid, of Ardgartan, exclaimed to her husband, when they parted company. "Here as a tutor, I suppose; but Isabel gives herself as many airs as if he were the Marquis himself."

"Well, at least he was the Marquis's tutor," said young Ardgartan; "and if she is pleased with her old man, it is very lucky for her."

And the fact was that Isabel was thoroughly pleased with her old man, and enjoyed her expedition with all her heart. The Marquis asked his old tutor to dinner, and gave Isabel his arm, and placed her by his side with much admiration of her sweet looks. "I used to know your father," he told her, "when I was a lad. What an eye he had! and would tire us all out shooting over the Kilcranion moors." This acknowledgment of Captain Duncan as himself in some way received by the local deities, was balm to Isabel's soul, and opened her shy intelligence to the Marquis, who found her little sayings as piquant as sayings usually are which fall from pretty lips. And the Marchioness offered Mrs. Lothian her box at the Opera to Isabel's great confusion and perplexity. The young ladies of the house clustered round her, telling her what the music was to be, and how she would enjoy it, and how much they envied her her first opera. "You will think you are in heaven," cried one enthusiastic girl. When she left the grand house in Park Lane, with this ecstatic prospect before her, Isabel felt that her life,

r stepmother had said, was indeed like a fairy

But is it so nice as they say?" she asked her
nd, as they went home.
To them it is," said that man of universal in
tion, "for they have been brought up to it. I
ot so sure about you; but you must ask me no
questions, for I want you to judge of it for your

nd it was with a sense of responsibility that Isabe
ut for this new felicity. She had put on one o
vedding dresses, the blue one which her husband
—and had white flowers in her pretty brown hair
ense of her present judicial position took from
he pretty girlish excitement into which she had
about all the novelties that surrounded her, and
ed that soft dignity of the old man's wife, the
of age she had tried to put on when she first
ed Mrs. Lothian's responsibility. She looked, per
rather more girlish in this state of importance
eriousness than she did in her livelier mood
there was another reason, too, for unusual dignity
Mary was to go with her under her charge
I trust to you, Mrs. Lothian, to take care o
the Marchioness had said, with a sense of the
which was far from being shared by Isabel. I
the first time she had ever acted as chaperone
her mind was disturbed by the awful question
she should do if any one approached the young
who was under her charge. "Is she not to speak
ny one?—and am I to keep everybody away?'
sked her husband, and if possible admired Mr
an's knowledge more than ever when he instructed

her in her easy duties. As for Lady Mary herself, she was quite excited by the prospect of witnessing Isabel's delight. "Oh I wish I were you!" she cried, "I am *blasée*, you know. I know them all off by heart, and exactly how they will look, and how Grisi will bring out her notes. But you will think you are in heaven." And then they all got into the lordly carriage, with the powdered footmen, and went to this earthly paradise, with no thought of any evil awaiting them, or harm which could enter there.

There were many opera-glasses directed to the box when Isabel in her simplicity and pretty dignity, half matron half child, took her seat in it. Lady Mary was no beauty, and the eyes of the world directed themselves to the fresh, new face with a rustle of curiosity and interrogation. Isabel gave one glance round her in acknowledgment of the fine assembly, and the ladies in their pretty dresses, and then turned her face intent upon the stage. The opera was *Lucia di Lammermoor*. Her companions both watched her with much more interest than they did the scene—Lady Mary with delightful expectation at first, then with a shade of disappointment and surprise: while the minister looked on amused, and yet conscious of the least little shade of anxiety, lest his wife should compromise herself by a total want of susceptibility to the entertainment. Neither of them observed, at first, among the gazers below and around one pair of opera-glasses, which the owner with a sudden start had directed full upon the box at the commencement of the performance, and which remained fixed, held with rigid hands, during the whole of the first act. When the curtain fell, Isabel drew breath and heart, her eyes somewhat strained and

dilated with the intense gaze she had been fixing the stage.

"Don't you feel, then, as if *this* was all a dr and *that* was true?" said Lady Mary, who w musical enthusiast.

"I don't know," said Isabel. "I don't underst if I could see what they all mean." She gla round her and down at the stalls as she spoke, there she caught a glimpse of—what was it?—a part of a face staring up at her, almost hidden by black circles of the glasses, but yet with somet in its aspect that seemed familiar to her. "Do always stare like that?" she said, drawing back the sense of having received a shock, though she c not tell how.

"Oh, yes," said Lady Mary, hastily. "No minds—don't think of that. But tell me, don't feel it—doesn't it go to your heart?"

"I think, if there was anything in my hear could say it, and not sing it," said Isabel. "I t they are all mad. Is she Lucy Ashton? But L could not have the heart to sing. Oh, how could sing when she could scarcely speak?"

"Oh, don't you see," said Lady Mary, "that is what music is? When you cannot speak, you must out in music. You can go to the piano, and everything that is in your heart—you can sing——

"Yes," said Isabel, softly; "Auld Robin Gray, an Irish song the poor girl sang when her heart breaking; but all that music, full of shakes, and tr and great bursts like the organ made on purpose— not if her heart was breaking!"

"But, my dear," said the minister, "how c
tell? an Italian heart may break in music?"

"Perhaps an Italian heart, but not Lucy Ash
said Isabel, a wave of sudden colour passing o
face. How strange it was, out of this crown
happy, peaceful existence to look back on th
when she had first read about Lucy Ashton, and
stood. She was an uninstructed rustic, and had
heard any music in her life before. This hi
says not a word in support of her way of thi
but such was her ignorant opinion, out of the
of her reticent Scotch heart, in which there lay
a sense of every emotion. It was her ignoran
doubt, which suggested it. Any one who had re
"Bride of Lammermoor" to her, with the ver
power of characteristic representation, could
played on her as on a delicate instrument; but
not know how to understand the other form
poem. It bewildered her. She was not in h
but in the most curious artificial sphere. And
what was that thing—those two black motionless
fixed upon her from below? Whose was the
the head that seemed to appear to her behind t
the aspect of the half-seen figure lost among the
She could not tell; but it all awoke the stranges
of uneasiness in her heart.

"I should like to go home," she whispered
husband. "Who is that always staring? A
music makes me dizzy. I should like to go hom

"Staring, my darling! There are so many
staring," said Mr. Lothian; "and I am not surp
he added, looking down upon her with fond a
tion. The speech and the movement brought hi

rd to the front of the box. He took no notice
ything else, having his whole attention fixed u
wife; but she saw a sudden movement below,
direction of the opera-glasses change a little, a
gaze was turned on her husband. The sensat
her was as if some dangerous being in a mask w
tching them. And everything was so unreal—th
ple on the stage going through what was suppo
be the business of life in music, and the specta
iodically rousing themselves to a little paroxysm
sy, according to Isabel's opinion. She had ne
n anything so unreal and so strange; and it mi
some enemy who was watching them for anyth
knew——

But she sat out the performance bravely, trying
ceal her first impressions, now and then can
y by a splendid outburst of melody, but still ke
close to her text that Lucy Ashton could not h
the heart. "How could she have remembered
like that, if her heart was breaking?" said Isa
there was a painful pang in her own which
d not explain. She seemed to see those gla
re her even on the way out, gazing at her fi
ind a pillar. They were before her eyes all
home, and withdrew her attention even from L
ry's lamentations over her want of musical ta
t I see it is because you are not used to it," L
ry said at last. "Half-a-dozen more evenings wo
e you think so differently. Oh, Mr. Lothian, s
ttle longer, and let us educate your wife!"

"It would take a longer time than we can spa
the minister, only half pleased with the suggesti
Isabel gave a little shudder in her corner.

was thinking of that opera-glass, and of the high crest of hair rising behind it, and the air of the half-seen figure. Could it be——? Whom could it be? It was the only unsuccessful attempt at pleasure she had made since they went to town.

CHAPTER VII.

The Loch was in full beauty when the minister and his wife returned home. It was a clear, lovely summer night, with stretches of daffodil sky over the blue hills towards the west, and a pale young moon glimpsing at herself in the water. The flowers were all bright in the Manse garden, the villagers nodding pleasant recognition, the Loch all cheerful with boats skimming like seabirds over the water. Just such a lingering, lovely eve as that on which Isabel had stood solitary at the door of the Glebe Cottage a year ago, wondering if she were cut off altogether from life. Since that she had (she thought) been drinking her full of it, enjoying and making use of her existence as it is given to few people to do. And how sweet it was to come home! "This is worth London twenty times over," the minister said, when they had rested after their journey, standing with his wife beside him on the little garden terrace before the windows of the Manse drawing-room, looking out upon the water which lay so bright under the soft young moon. Daylight had not gone yet, though the moon was shining; over the braes towards the west the sky was still the colour of daffodils, with breaks of blue all about and around, and the light palpitating within it, ready at a moment's

ptice to break forth again, and illuminate earth
aven. The colour was still bright in all the flo
ough it was ten o'clock. "This is worth Lo
enty times over," Mr. Lothian said. "Are you
r sorry, Isabel, to come home?"

"Glad," she said, standing by his side, looking
ell pleased on the scene she knew so well. "B
m glad we went, too. Seeing things makes pe
xperienced; it is like growing old. But you sh
ot laugh at everything I say."

"It is not at you, my dear," said the minister; '
o not get old on my account, my darling. I like
onnie Isabel to be young."

"I should like to be thirty," she said, with a
ugh; "then I would be nearer you."

"You could be no nearer me," he said, dra
r close to him, "my bonnie darling! Remer
ways that I could not be happier, Isabel. I
e desire of my heart."

Why this little scene should have taken so sol
tone, neither could tell. One moment they
ughed, and the very next moment he was ma
is little confession of supreme happiness as if for
mfort when he should be away from her. Bu
as not going away from her; neither was there
ssibility of estrangement in their future. There
o passion in Isabel's mind to make her exactin
ifficult. She held up her soft cheek to him, an
ssed her as if she had been his daughter. She
roud of him, so erect and handsome as he was, th
t young. His white locks set off the fresh colou
s cheeks; his arm was as good a support an
rong a defence as if he had been but twenty-five;

though his ruffles were slightly out of order with the journey, and the little pin not quite straight in the cambric, his appearance was not impaired by that touch of carelessness. And then, he knew so much! —Isabel by his side began to feel that she, too, was a different creature, developing new faculties every day.

"If we were behaving as the people do in your favourite opera," said the minister, "we would sing a duet of felicity. My dear, you've got a pretty, sweet little voice. I think you must learn to sing."

"Oh, don't speak of that opera," said Isabel; "I hated it. The men singing about everything—even their dinner! And Lucy Ashton——"

"My dear, it was not Lucy Ashton; it was Lucia di Lammermoor."

"I know; but it was meant to be all one," said Isabel. "Lucy sing like yon! Oh, they cannot tell what it is to be in despair."

"My darling, and how should you know?" said the minister, looking at her with his admiring smile.

"I don't think I know; but I can divine," said Isabel; and her eyes seemed to deepen so, that her husband gazing into them could not make out their meaning. But he saw a little shudder, quite slight and momentary, pass over her. And his first thought was that she must be ill.

"Come in," he said; "it is growing cold. How is it we have twice become so serious this pleasant night, after coming home?"

"It is that opera; I never like to think of it," said Isabel, and shivered again, and went in, her husband following. It was very childish of her; and yet

she felt just as she had felt at the opera, as one were watching them—looking at their life with unkindly eyes.

t day, Mr. Lothian stayed at home, going no than the village to see the wives and ask after n; and in the evening came Mr. Galbraith to with delight his long-interrupted "cracks." of the fire they sat at the open window, Isabel ut and in cutting flowers, and looking after den. "There is some comfort in this—now we t our pleasant nights back again," said the . "You saw many fine things in London, but ound you saw nothing so bonnie as the Loch, young moon."

," said Isabel; "nothing but streets, and , and ladies riding. Yet I am glad to have ow I will never feel ignorant when you speak. as good as jumping ten years."

her thought is to make herself thirty," said ister, with a laugh of happiness; "but I tell lbraith, I like her best as she is. Sometimes I am too happy," he went on as she flitted out garden; "I have everything I can desire."

never knew the feeling myself," said the e; "but they say it is of kin to melancholy. e to wish for. I cannot say I wish for much but that's no out of satisfaction, but out of "

spair is a hard word," said the minister.

, ay; far too hard a word. "I've not vigour left to nourish a passion. It's more a sense of possibility of any change, and a kind of con- d, minister, I'm free to acknowledge it—I

thought you were but an old fool, setting your on a young thing; but I see now you were a man."

"A happy one at least," said Mr. Lothian; it would be harder now to leave this life, than it was before."

"Well, well, there's little likelihood," said Dominie, with some impatience; "let us be thankful —you are as likely to live till a hundred as any I know."

The minister shook his head, and then he repeated softly a verse out of one of the mournfullest, sweetest poems that ever was breathed out of a broken heart. It was Leopardi's *Amore e Morte* that had come into Mr. Lothian's mind, for he was a man not without some elegancies of culture, though he was but a Scotch minister, and Italian was one of them. But a Scotch Dominie did not understand it, and some readers might be as unlearned as the Dominie, here is a rough English of what he said:—

"When in the heart profound
New Love first draws his breath,
Languid and faint, is with it found
A wish for death.
Such is the first effect, I know not why
When Love is pure and high;
Perhaps because the eye takes fright
Then at this desert, and earth seems
A waste in which no man can dwell
Without that new sole infinite
Joy that has dawned upon his dreams—"

Mr. Lothian said the lines in the sweet Italian, and his heart gave that exquisite ache of mortal fear and prevision to which every loving heart is subject. If anything should happen to his Isabel!—what would

life be worth to him more? The Dominie sat looking on with just that touch of good-natured contempt, natural to the man who had never known any of these emotions, and found them half amusing and somewhat weak. But just then Isabel came hastily up and brushed past them almost running, as if in fear.

"I thought I saw a man in the garden," she said, shedding, for the first time for ever so long, a few hasty tears.

"My darling," cried the minister, starting up, "where?"

"Oh, down among the trees," she said, "down there—outside the garden wall. I saw the branches stir,—and I thought——"

"But, my dear, any man that likes may be on the other side of the wall," said her husband: "why should that frighten you?"

And then Isabel dried her tears. "It was very foolish," she said, "I know it might be anybody; but it gave me a fright—as if he were going to jump over the wall and come in to us here."

"And if he had?" said the minister, smiling—till Isabel smiled too, seeing the absurdity of her alarm. But she watched anxiously when Mr. Lothian and the Dominie made the round of the garden. Of course, there was no man to be seen, and they went in and closed the windows, and talked very comfortably for an hour before they separated, with no more interest or solemnity. Mr. Lothian had to attend a meeting of Presbytery next day. This pleasant evening was the end of his holiday: and such a holiday as it had been, —a *poem in his life.*

Next morning he rode away from the Manse door, looking, his wife thought, a very picture of what a man of "his years" ought to be. She had smoothed down the cambric ruffles in which she took so much interest with her own hand, and put the gold pin carefully into the clean, well-starched, daintily-crimped folds. There was not a spot upon him, nor upon the glossy hide of the horse, which was a recent acquisition, and, in the opinion of the neighbourhood, "too spirity a beast" for the minister. "I shall be back as soon as I can," he said, as he turned from the door; "but I may be obliged to stop and dine somewhere, so don't be alarmed, my dear, if I am late." And he took off his hat to his darling, and rode away saluting her as if she had been the Queen. All this adoration and tender respect had their effect upon Isabel, though she was not conscious of it. She went in and put away some of the things from the breakfast-table, the little silver tea-caddy, the pretty crystal dishes for the butter and jam, things too dainty to be touched by the hands of the servants, and put the room into more delicate order, moving about in her summer morning dress, like a bit of light in the solid mahogany-furnished dining-room. And then she went and gave her orders for the dinner, which for that day was to be something which would not spoil by waiting, and which could be eaten cold on the morrow, if Mr. Lothian was not back in time. "The minister may stop to dine with the Presbytery," his wife said; and lingered a little in the clean, bright kitchen, hearing some scraps of news from Kirstin, and arranging about various things that had to be done. "If Janet gets her work finished soon, we might put up the curtains

in the spare room, not to lose the day," said the mistress of the Manse, "as the minister is away." It was a day of leisure, with no special point in it, a day for odd little pieces of business, and the sweet silent leisure which breaks so pleasantly into the routine of a settled life. After she had given her orders, Isabel took her work and went to the seat outside the drawing-room window, on the little terrace gay with flowers. It is cold sitting out on Loch Diarmid even in June, but the sun was full on the front of the house, and she was young and felt no chill. She gave a thought or two to the spare-room and its curtains, which had been taken down to preserve their freshness; and upon the probability of guests arriving if this lovely weather lasted, and upon the pleasant ride the minister must be having along the sunshiny road to Maryburgh, which was some miles off. It was down the Loch, along the waterside all the way. And then Isabel's mind floated off to the work in her hands, to the flowers at her feet, to that soft, pleased consciousness of her own being and well-being, which was natural to a young creature under such circumstances. She was so different from what she had been at the Glebe, so smoothed and opened out and developed—able to talk familiarly of things she would have thought altogether out of her sphere, looking a different creature, used to be served, and copied, and admired. And it is so good to be admired and made much of!—the inner being expands under it as flowers do under the sunshine. Isabel could figure nothing to herself more sweet than to sit there in the morning leisure with the sweet air blowing the light locks on her forehead, and the *long summer holiday* before her.

It was not that she was glad of her husban
sence—but still there was a certain holiday
about it: nothing was expected from her—she l
thing to think of—nothing but to sit in the s
and see the water playing on the beach, and th
on the water, and watch the shadows flying,
like some giant's breath, over the braes; and
know all the same that her domestic duties wer
accomplished, and that he would come back
evening with all the news of the country-side
papers, and books, and a hundred bits of gos
might have been dreary to be left at home alon
day,—but once, now and then—the long forenc
stationary and unfathomable, like those blue de
sky she gazed up into, and never could get
heart of. "You will think you are in heaven!'
was it those words came back to her ear? In
indeed! in a painted, blazing, artificial place, wi
singing at each other, and Lucy Ashton,—
Lucy,—with her hair on her shoulders, shrieki
heart out in musical despair. Isabel, the ig
was offended for her saddest heroine. That
creature frozen up by her misery! "But I
think I was in heaven now," she said softly, to
raising her eyes to sweet Loch Diarmid, and th
ing sun, and the summer air, which made every
into a note of music. And then her wandering
suggested to her, that heaven itself would
sweeter—and she felt a momentary depression
she could not desire heaven, earth being so
And so the pleasant day ran on.

It was about dusk in the long summer e
when, listening for her husband's return, and g

tle weary of her solitude, Isabel heard some on past the Manse gate, and a few minutes after th nnie came in to tell her, that Mr. Lothian had ju ed,—that he had been sent for by some one wh sick up towards Kilcranion, but did not expect t long. "He dined at Maryburgh," the Domini , "and here's some parcels he threw to me as h ed. If you'll put on your hat, Mrs. Lothian, it's nie night—we might take a stroll among th her, and meet him as he comes home?"

He had called her Mrs. Lothian scrupulously eve a her marriage. Isabel went out with him, we ked, into the soft night, which was musical wit rustle of the trees, and the splash of the water o shore, and the voices from the village.

'But I think it will rain," she said, looking up t sky.

'And that's true," said the Dominie, turning shar d, as a sudden blast, for which he was unprepare a in his face. Clouds had been gathering overhea ng all the evening, but now it came down all a , with an evident intention of continuing for th of the night. They stood for a moment uncertai ing, as Isabel long remembered, the sound of th e's hoofs carrying her husband over the hill in th ness of the night.

'And nobody could run after him now with a plai cloak," she said, throwing her gown over her hea as the fashion of the country, to shield her fro rain.

'He would be a clever runner that would make u em," said Mr. Galbraith; "but after sixteen yea

at Loch Diarmid, a drop or two, more or less, will do him no harm."

And then they went back into the dining-room where the lamp was lighted. The lamp did not give a very brilliant light when there was no fire to help it, and the room had a dusky look, as rooms will have of summer evenings after all the light and gladness of the day.

"I think I will light the fire," said Isabel. "He'll be cold, and he likes to see it. Here," she added, with a little pride in her London experience, "it is never too warm for a fire."

"All the better," said the Dominie, stretching his hands over the crackling, cheerful blaze, when Isabel had lifted away the ornaments on the hearth, and set light to the fire, which, in conformity with the necessities of the climate, was laid ready below. "A fire is a kind of Christian creature, and keeps a lonely man company; but, if I were you, Mrs. Lothian, considering the long day he's had, and a wetting at the end of it, I would have ben the kettle too."

"And so I will," said Isabel, who was nowise shocked by the suggestion. The kettle was brought accordingly, and placed on the hob, where the old man contemplated it with much satisfaction; and she opened her press, and brought out the silver liqueur-stand which had been Mr. Galbraith's present to her on her marriage, and the silver sugar-basin, and the toddy ladles, and all that was necessary. She was so pleased with her pretty silver things, that it was a pleasure to her to have to take them out, and see them reflecting the light on the table; and the fire began to brighten up all the dark corners of the room, and to

on her pretty hair, which reflected it, and her
; which made little gleams about her as she
came.
a lucky man he is to have such a home-
the Dominie said, half to himself, with a
ch he intended for a sigh. And Isabel smiled
king any further notice, seeing herself pass
ss on the mantelpiece with all the reflexions
, and all the ruddy light dancing about the
tter than a batchelor-den with two men over
there could not be much doubt about that.
made all her preparations, and had her tea-
ht in and placed at one end of the table, and
ar through all her activity to hear her hus-
home.
the entire household was thus engaged, both
d mistress preparing for the master's arrival,
Dominie who first noticed that the little fire
ade for him was beginning to burn out, and
to puff away all its contents in steam. He
le joke over it, and had both renewed, but
feel uneasy in his heart. The night had
y dark all at once, and the rain would drive
the horse's face as it came down the brae.
h a spirity beast!" Mr. Galbraith glanced out
window when Isabel was not looking, and
he Loch had got up in a white foam, and
y was growing blacker and blacker. Just
ound of the horse's hoofs was heard again.
hed, dashing furiously down the hill, and
t the house towards the stable which was at

he is at last!" said Isabel cheerfully, not

noting in the easiness of her mind the precipitate gallop, or that there was anything out of the ordinary in her husband dismounting at the stable-door.

"It will be for the wet," the Dominie said, feeling a sudden pang of alarm. "I'll go and see, with your permission——"

It seemed to Isabel that he was never coming back, and that her husband took the most unreasonable time to make his appearance. "He'll be telling David about the horse," she said to herself. "He is so particular to make the poor beast comfortable." Then she poked up the fire to make it blaze, and drew his easy chair to its side. "He'll be taking off his wet things," she went on half aloud, accounting to herself for his delay: "He'll be warming himself at the kitchen fire—but why not here? He'll have gone upstairs to change." At last she ran out to the door losing patience. The Dominie met her coming back. She could not imagine what was the matter with him. If he could have been drinking—and if there had been time for him to intoxicate himself—that might have explained the glazed look in his eye, and the imbecile smile about his lips.

"It was not him at all," said the Dominie, with a jaunty air, which made her wonder again—could he have taken a dram in the kitchen?" "It was all a mistake. It was some one riding post-haste to Maryburgh,—somebody from—Kilcranion, I suppose. You do not think the minister would come down upon us at a break-neck gallop like that?"

"But it went to the stable-door," said Isabel, astonished, but not yet roused to alarm.

"No, no, nothing of the kind. Sounds are deceiving in the night. It's a man and horse away to

laryburgh. Ye can hear them echoing down
oad now," he said, throwing the windows sudd
pen. A gust of wind and rain suddenly came in,
e closed it again hurriedly, with a nervous h
hich made the identification of any sound impos
'There's a storm brewing," he said, "but we'll
the fire, and be all the cozier within."

And with a curious gallantry, which took I
tirely by surprise, he placed a chair by the fir
r, and made her sit down. Then he resumed
n, and held his hands, which she could see
mbling, over the blaze. "I think I'll go and
I can see him," he said, after a moment. "I
u stir, Mrs. Lothian. It's no a night for you t
ur bonnie head out of doors. Promise me you'
r!"

Isabel could make no answer in her amaze.
e went away closing the door carefully after him,
ft her, beginning to hear her heart beat, and wo
g what it could mean. No doubt, had her love
a more passionate description, it would have t
ght before now. But it was so difficult to re
at anything could happen to the husband-father-
an who had encountered all the risks of country
harmed as long as she could remember. She a
rself, what could be the matter with the Domini
d then she wondered what ailed the Diarmid
lencorrie, where Mr. Lothian had gone, that
ould have sent for him so late. And then she list
tently in the silence, till her heart fluttered up ir
rs, and she could hear nothing else. She sa
emed to her for a long time, over the fire, wa
d wondering, and then she heard the kitchen-

open and shut, and a sound as of voices. By this time alarm had begun to take possession of her,—not terror so much as uneasiness, wonder,—a sense that in this night, which was so dark, and through which the wind began to howl, something—anything, might happen. This only—but it worked sharply upon Isabel. She sprang up and ran to the door, and out into the hall. There she caught a glimpse for one moment of her maids, and the Dominie, and the gardener, all clustered about a drenched figure, with a face as pale as death, which she recognised to be her stepmother, Jean Campbell. When they heard her, they fell apart, with looks of fright, and Mr. Galbraith advanced towards her. He was pale too, white to the very lips, and pointed to her to go back into the room she had left.

"My dear," he said, taking her hand, leading her in, with gentle force, "don't go there just now. Keep up your courage. He has met with an accident."

"An accident!" said Isabel, rousing at once, "oh, Mr. Gilbraith, let David get out the old gig—that would help him home."

"They're bringing him home, my dear," he said, looking at her wistfully. "You must keep up your courage; they are coming."

"Let me run and see that his room is ready, said Isabel, trying to break from him; "he will be wet, and there should be a fire. I like to see to everything myself. Oh, Mr. Galbraith, let me go and see that his room is right!"

"The women are looking to that," he said, with a suppressed groan; "my dear, I fear it's a bad accident. You must summon your courage."

"Is he not able to walk?" said Isabel, her face

lunching suddenly as there came to her through
uses of the wind sounds as of the tramp of men
oaching. This time the Dominie groaned aloud.
ok both her hands and placed her trembling in
air she had placed by the fireside for *him*.

"Stay still here," he said; "you must not go ot
agitate him. I will bring you your stepmother—
ll tell you all about it." And he rushed away f
r once more closing the door. Oh, what was
bel's brow began to throb, and her heart jum
dly against her breast. A bad accident! It w
the new horse that was so "spirity." Oh, why
e shut in and not to go to him? She could not l
; she was the fit person to receive him, whatever
ppened. And who but herself could see that
om was all right and everything in order? A sec
he she rose and ran to the door, but once more
et as she opened it, not this time by the Domi
t by Jean Campbell, who came in, all wet
vering, with such a distraught look in her fac
abel had never seen there before.

"O my bonnie lamb!" cried Jean, throwing
ms round and detaining her. "No yet, you mu
yet. O my bonnie woman! You that I thou
safe and free of all trouble! But it canna
abel,—it canna be—stay here with me."

"I will go," said Isabel, struggling with her.
ll see what is wrong. If he has hurt himself,
nts me all the more."

"He's feeling nae hurt," cried Jean, holding
spdaughter fast; her pale face working and her
aining. "He's in nae pain—O my bonnie Isab

"What do you mean?" said Isabel, with inward horror, under her breath.

"O my lamb!" Jean answered, clasping her in her arms. The young wife broke out of the embrace with her old petulant impatience. She threw the door wide open, rushing upon the knowledge of her fate. At the very moment when she did so, the men had entered the hall moving slowly with their burden. She stood uttering not a word, like a creature made out of stone. It was not that she was stupified. She recognised the men individually one by one, and through her mind there passed the curious speculation how they could all have been found together at such a time. And they carried—what? Something all covered over with a great grey plaid, stretched out upon a broad plank of the wood which had been lying by the roadside fresh from the sawmill—something which neither moved, nor groaned, nor betrayed the least uneasiness at the unsteady progress of its bearers. She gave a cry, as much of wonder as of misery. What was it? And then Mr. Galbraith tottered to her, staggering like a drunken man, with tears rolling down his grey ashy cheeks. "O my child!" cried the old man, taking her into his arms. She looked him piteously in the face; she could not understand his tears, strange though the sight of them was. She would believe nothing but words. "What is it?" she cried, "what does it mean?"

By degrees it was got into her mind,—she never knew how; they did not tell her he was dead, though they believed so: but that the doctor had been sent for, and would tell what was to be done. Isabel did not faint—such an escape from the consciousness of evil was not possible to her. She retained all her

faculties in an acuteness beyond all previous k
ledge.

"I should be there," she said, struggling
them, "to do what is wanted. Let me go—no
shall nurse him, but me." But she was stopped a
by the doctor, who had arrived at once, and
put her back, exchanging a look of pity with
Dominie.

"You must stay here, Mrs. Lothian," he said
must see him alone, and I'll come and tell you." W
he was gone, Isabel walked about the room with
fierce impatience of suspense. "You'll no tell wh
it," she said, wringing her hands. "Oh, tell me
it is. Is it his head or a leg broken, or what i
Is it only me that must not know?"

And then Jean came to her and took her in
arms; but all that she said was, "My bonnie wo
my bonnie lamb!" words that meant nothing.
waited, it seemed for an hour or more, and th
man's steps sounded slowly and solemnly on the
and the doctor with a troubled face looked in.
did not look at Isabel, eagerly as she was confro
him; but cast an appealing glance over her hea
Jean Campbell. "Tell her!" he said, with agit
in his voice. And then the young widow knew.

"God preserve us!" the men were saying in
passage, "two hours ago he passed, as fine a ma
ye could see—and now he's a heap o' motio
clay."

"There's been foul play," said John Macwh
'Ye'll never tell me but there's been foul play."

"But wha could have an ill thought to
minister? He hadna an enemy in the world.

neebors," said Andrew White, "we've lost a God-fearing man.

"It maun have been for robbery," said another.

"There's nae signs of robbery, except the cambric ruffles a' torn from his shirt, and the breastpin he aye wore."

"That wasna worth much," said Macwhirter, "but nae doubt the villain was disturbed and grabbit at the first thing he saw. As ye say, Andrew, he hadna an enemy in the world."

This conversation the Dominie overheard—the low bass voices of the men sounding strangely concentrated and solemn amid the wailing and tears of the house. Isabel herself had been taken away, capable of no tears as yet. And there was the cheerful kettle singing and steaming, the fire blazing, all the preparations upon the table for the return of the master of the house. And it was thus the minister had come home. The depths of desolation had opened all at once in the mysterious world, and swallowed up this house with all its joys and hopes. But a touch and the whole fairy palace had crumbled into dust and ashes.

CHAPTER VIII.

NOTHING had occurred on Loch Diarmid for ages which had made so intense a sensation in the district as the death of the minister. The whole country bubbled up and seethed about that one house on the slope,—the Manse, peaceablest of habitations, a few *days* ago so full of quiet happiness, but now shrouded *in* a veil of horror and woe. Was it accident, or was

it murder? At first the opinion of the country-sid
clined strongly in favour of the former supposition.
beast was "spirity"—too spirity for a man of
Lothian's age; and the night was stormy and d
and he had not nor could have any enemy—and
was not robbed. It soon, however, became known
there was an actual witness of the tragedy, whose
position would set all doubts at rest.

"I hope she didna do it hersel," said the sr
when the tale was discussed. "I canna unders
Jean Campbell being the one to see it."

"She had nae cause to be ill at the minister,"
Sandy Diarmid; "he was aye kind to her; and
cause an awfu' deed's been done, that's no reasor
taking away an honest woman's character."

"Lord bless me! am I taking away her charact
cried Macwhirter. "Man, can you no tell a joke
earnest? If I said she had dung down Ben Lom
or the Cobbler, it would be about as likely. B
man maun mind his p's and his q's when he speal
the like of you?"

"I like nae such jokes," said Sandy, shaking
head, "especially in the moment of sic an awfu' vi
ion. Nothing like it has ever happened on the l
n my day. I hope it be na true a' thae proj
said, We've neglected our day o' grace, and noo v
delivered over to Satan. It looks real like it.
ays there can be nae doubt that clour in his fore
was the man's doing, and with a' his might!"

"Naebody that saw it could doubt that,"
Macwhirter, more gravely, "but I doubt it was
mair than manslaughter at the worse. The man
wan and stunned with the fa', and the tramp—

was a tramp—saw a glitter of gold about him, and was struck wi' a sudden temptation. I canna think it was anything waur."

"And, what is awfu' strange is, that nae tramp has been seen about these parts that answers Jean's description," said a chance comer. "Our Margaret saw a man gaun ower the braes the last moonlight night—but he was humphie-backit, and no so big as herself; and Robbie has a story of a muckle black man like Mr. John——"

"If ye listen to a' the wives have seen, and a' the weans' stories, you'll have plenty to do," said the smith. "But here's Andrew White, and maybe he has some information. He'll gie us a sermon, at least," he added in an undertone.

Mr. Lothian had been, as it is common to say, much beloved in his parish; but his people, as has been seen, recovered their spirits at an early date, and found such consolation in a discussion of the circumstances of his death, as made that dreadful event almost a pleasure, and certainly a public benefit. Andrew White had been at a funeral, and was in the solemn costume worn in Scotland on such occasions. The scarf round his hat was tied in a large bow, and fell down with long ends behind him. He wore an evening suit of black with "weepers" on the sleeves of his coat. He was a portentous figure in the daylight, but not to eyes accustomed to the dress, which it is the pride of every Scotch peasant to possess to go to funerals in. Andrew's aspect, however, suited his costume. He looked like the conventional type (often very far from the reality), which the public accepts as that of a Dissenting pastor. It was not Chadband,

benign and oily, but a more melancholy and me
specimen; his very air, as he stepped into the smi
was of itself a rebuke.

"Have ye naething better to do than to cl
here," he said, "John Macwhirter? and the pa
come through such a fiery furnace. I would l
thought it might have had an effeck upon you a',
on a' worldly-minded men."

"Is there ony mair news?" said old Sandy; "tl
just what I've been saying. Such a hale, strong, v
likit man!"

"Ay, he was a weel-likit man," said Andrew; '
I hope he wasna taken unprepared,—too weel-l
Sandy. "Ye shall be hated of all men for my na
sake," is what is written. There was none of tha
Mr. Lothian's case—and yet I hope he wasna t
unprepared."

"He was a real good man," said the smith, '
we're a' of one mind in these days. There's nae
secution that I ken of. I hope we dinna hate
Name itself—"

"Ay, and with a bitter hatred," said the el
every carnal soul among ye. Na, it's no the fas
to persecute,—Satan's mair cunning; you can do b
than that. Ye can sneer, and ye can gibe, and
can call names. "Be glad when men speak ev
you." But the poor minister, he was pleased that
could speak well; and now he's snatched away
moment without time to leave any assurance to
friends of the state of his soul. I hope he was
pared."

"The Lord be thankit, I'm no ane of you
lk," said John Macwhirter; "I've a respect for

Maker as I'm aye saying. I wadna turn off no a brute beast that had served me weel, because it wasna just ready the last time I wanted it. Nor will He, —or I'm sair mistaken in Him. But the question was—Is there any news?"

"There's nae news from where he is gone," said Andrew, "which is the real question. I think little of aught else. As for the law, it's busy swearing the folk and hearing the witnesses. Jean Campbell, she's very positive; but, whether it was the accident did it, or whether it was the man, or who the man was, or what was his motive, is past our telling. The one thing I can tell ye is, that this is from the Lord. It was prophesied to us that if we let the day of our visitation pass, fearful things would be sent among us from the Lord, and so far as I can see they're now begun."

"But he wasna ane of the scorners, honest man," said the smith, slightly subdued, "I canna see how the wyte should fall on him."

"I wouldna say a word now he's dead and gane," said the elder; "but only in warning to your souls. If there's a careless shepherd whose ain the sheep are not, that lets his flock stray where they will, and pays no heed to the day of visitation, weel I wot it's little more than justice if the first blow falls on him."

Here there was a general outcry of indignation. "A better man never steppit;" "As good to the poor folk as if he had been their brother;" "And worth six of your newfangled preachers;" "Elder though you be, you're no blate to say a ill word o' the minister;" "And him scarce in his grave yet," cried old Sandy, as the climax of the storm.

"I'm no minding what you say," said the el
he withdrew; "it's my place, and no yours,
eak. The Lord is no to be cheated as we are. A
ough he may have been a good man—(and the L
ant he was prepared!)—that's not to say he migh
a careless shepherd. He wouldna see the day
itation—nor would you—and behold your hous
ft unto you desolate. Take tent to yourselves
ng as there is time."

The parish in general, however, did not take
e matter in Andrew's way. The day of visita
y this time had but little effect upon anybody's m
d Mr. Lothian's virtues were fully acknowled
nd the mind of the district was moved with
rofoundest longing for news, however small the sc
ight be, that was afforded to it. People sprang
n every side who had seen a man about whom t
d not recognise as a person known on the L
ut, then, unfortunately the differences in their
riptions of him were so great that no indivic
keness could be made out. One declared he wa
rfect giant, another a little hunchback, one that
as dressed like a gentleman, and another that he
e meanest tramp. Jean Campbell was the only
es who had anything to tell; and her story, ind
as terribly distinct as to the fact, though wanting
very detail that could identify the criminal. She g
r deposition in the narrative form which is alw
ngenial to the peasant mind, and held by it steac
ough her strong, vigorous frame and rude he
re almost worn out by what she had seen.

"I had been to the mill to ask about my me
d Jean; "and then I thought I would step in at

Manse and just ask for Mrs. Lothian, who is my step-daughter. I heard a horse coming in the distance as I came out on the highroad from the awfu' lonesome lane that leads to the mill. And glad I was to hear it. "Here's company coming," I said to myself. Ye'll maybe no ken the road. There's a high bank on one side with trees, and on the other you're just on the braes, that are whins, and heather, and naething else. I was walking slow on that side to let the horseman come up, for it's an ill bit of the road, and a man's company is aye canny. Just afore the horse came up, I was awfu' frichtened wi' a rustling on the bank. It was dark, and ye couldna have seen your hand before you; but I could see there was somebody among the trees, and what would he be doing there? I canna think he saw me, for the bank is awfu' thick with trees, and I was doun among the whin-bushes, and a' dark round and round. The horse came up, galloping as steady as a rock; but, just as it came to me, there was a blast of branches, and stones and moss came rumbling down the bank, just before the beast's very feet. He was a very spirity beast, as a' the parish kens—and he backit, and he reared, and up with his feet in the air, till I was nigh out of my senses with fright. Then there was a whirr first, and I heard a fa' and a groan. It was an awfu' thud, and the groan was an awfu' groan. I think he must have fainted. And I was awfu' feared myself; but before I could recover the man was down from the brae. There was a break in the clouds for a moment, and I could see him come rumbling down the bank.... No, I canna tell you what like he was. It was just a black shadow on the black trees. He went up to the one that had

gn, and me, thinking nae evil, I took heart, an
up from where I had been among the whins, an
t forward too. The one black spot bent ower th
r, as if it had been to lift him—and me, it was
lips to say, "Lord bless us! I'm here too, and we
e the poor man!" And then I saw a motion, an
rd it.... Eh, dinna ask me what!—a dull, heav
ke, and a crack, and another groan. I gave a cr
f he had killed me the next minute I couldna hav
ped it; and the creature started, and made a gra
something, and then turned and stared a' roun
ied scream after scream, no able to stop. I ha
k down among the whins, and he couldna see m
d then he began to speel the brae as fast as
l come down. I stood there and cried, and dursti
, And in a whilie down the lane came Andre
ute and his wife and their laddie, with a lanter
d then we saw it was the minister. I was ne
d with the fright and the awfu' feeling myse
r weel I saw he had been murdered there where
. The laddie ran to the village for help, and A
w's man came down from the mill. And when
se to myself, I took my gown over my head, an
a' the way till I got to the Manse.... Me cat
villain! how could I catch him—and him up li
rild-cat into the wood? Na, I thought of Isabel.
meaning of Mrs. Lothian, his poor young wi
d that is a' I can tell you, if ye were to questi
till the morn."

The miller's testimony corroborated Jean's. "Th
e" had cried upon him, as he was sitting down
supper, to come and listen to the screams from t
e; and Andrew being no coward, and having bowe

of compassion, notwithstanding his gloomy view of religious matters, rushed down immediately with his wife and "the laddie." He heard a rustling in the wood as he passed, but took no notice, not connecting it, he said, with the accident, and found the minister insensible, and scarcely breathing. He had had a bad fall from his horse, which of itself Andrew thought must have been enough to injure him seriously; and there was besides the fatal blow on the forehead, which had smashed the skull, and extinguished all consciousness and possibility of life. The testimony of the doctor was the only other important point in the evidence. He could not decide whether the other injuries might not have been fatal. That they were very serious, there was no doubt; but it was the blow which had killed Mr. Lothian. As to the man who did it, however, no information could be gathered. He was to Jean but "a black shadow" in the darkness. She could not even tell what was his height, or dress, or anything about him. The only thing of which she could be quite sure, was that the covering on his head was not a hat, which, in her opinion, made it evident that he must be a tramp—for gentlemen in those days did not wear the undignified headdresses of this more familiar period. And then, the whole country-side came in with tales of men it had seen—men of every variety of look, and dress, and purpose—who turned out to be pedlars, and labourers in search of work, and tourists, and innocent vagrants of every description, capable of giving an account of themselves. There was one story, better authenticated than the rest, of a strange man, who had certainly been seen in the steamer going down Loch Lomond the next day, with a scarf round the lower

t of his face, though it was June, and his h
ched over his brows—but then it was a wet da
a man in the Highlands may put on a comfort
out having any intention of concealing himse
d there was no telegraph in these days by whi
ursue a fugitive, even had the traces of him be
iciently distinct; and they were not at all distin
re were not two people in the Loch who we
ed in opinion on the subject: some thought Jea
y altogether a delusion, and that the minister m
e struck against something with his head as
; and some thought it was a vulgar murder, wi
nt to rob; and some thought it was some one whc
Lothian had offended, who, seeing the minis
s at his mercy, had given a sudden blow, perha
meaning to kill. There was even a certain amou
suspicion concentrated upon a certain wild fell
he district, Robbie Sinclair by name, whose poac
and drinking propensities, and general lawlessn
behaviour, had made him subject to repeated
of from the parish authorities. Just before t
ister started for London, Robbie had been expos
special reprimand, and had taken it very sulki
"hat better is he than me?" the reprobate had be
rd to say. "If I had plenty o' siller, and cou
rry a wife like that, and take her to London, wou
ah my head about the Paitricks or Betty Simpson
d he had clenched his fist at Mr. Lothian. B
bbie, when he heard of the suspicion, came i
nant, with his brown face in a glow, and demand
investigation into all his circumstances at the tin
e strike a man that was down?" he cried, wi
e scorn of the accusation; and was believed fr

that day to have turned over a leaf, and become a new man.

The world of Loch Diarmid was thus utterly at sea, both as to the murderer and as to the motive for the crime. The minister had no enemies; for, to be sure, there was a difference between uttering a spiteful comment on his conduct in the smithy or "at the doors," and murdering him in a lonely road under cover of night. The general explanation of the torn ruffle was, that the murderer dimly perceived some ornament on his victim's breast, and snatched at it before he was scared by Jean's cries, which left him no time for further investigation. The poor little brooch, with its setting of pearls, and the two curls of hair intertwined, attained notoriety in the papers, being described elaborately over and over again, in case it should be offered anywhere for sale. But no clue to the murderer was obtained in this way. The excitement gradually died down in the country-side. And then a new excitement springing up—the interesting question of the new presentee, to whom the Marquis had given the living, in Mr. Lothian's place—quenched the commotion about the minister's murder almost as suddenly as it had risen. The road became a place of evil fame to all the population on the Loch; the game in the wood through which the slayer had vanished was safer than though protected by a score of keepers; nobody who could help it cared to pass the spot after dark; and the tale was told to every new comer, with praises of the minister and shakes of the head, and, "Eh, it 'll be lang or we see his like," in all parts of the parish. And then the excitement died out; and "at the doors," and on the way to

rch, and in the smithy, and everywhere else wh
parish resorted, all thoughts and criticisms beg
centre in the presentee.

But while this gradual softening process acted up
parish at large, the Manse was left like a desol
nd in the midst of all the life and sunshine.
once, mysteriously, as by a stroke of magic, t
t had vanished from it; a sort of dumb horror wr
house, abstracting it from the community of wh
ad been for so long a cheerful centre. Grass beg
grow on the path from the gate to the door. Exc
s Catherine and Jean Campbell, who went a
e daily, and messengers with inquiries after M
hian, which naturally grew less and less frequ
time went on, nobody visited the house of mourni
t that there was any lack of popular sympathy
young widow. There was not a lady in the cou
o did not make her appearance at the Manse-gat
offer social consolation, or, at least, condolenc
t Isabel saw nobody. She was stunned. The eff
n her whole being was such that she shrank fr
thing outside of the dim rooms and silent house
denly changed to her. She had not been a ve
ful bride; her satisfaction in her life had be
ghtened by no transport of hope or unusual flush
ppiness; everything had been very quiet in to
et content, peace, a dutiful satisfaction with her
d yet the most blessed of brides could not ha
n more distraught than Isabel when the sudd
w came, which shattered her life in a moment, a
ve her back upon her old restless, petulant self, t
ng from whom she had escaped.

There had been something in her husband's socie

in his unwavering observance of all her wishes, and in the consciousness of being loved so much more than she herself could love, and elevated to so much higher a position in his mind than she could feel belonged to her by nature, which harmonized all the jarring chords in her being, and would have made of her as sweet a woman as was the ideal of her which existed in Mr. Lothian's heart. All her impatient ways, her little freaks of temper, her movements of self-will, had been lulled into rest, and were vanishing from her, under that sweetest discipline of adoration, and admiration, and over-love. There are mean natures which are spoiled by such usage, but Isabel was not one of them: in proportion as she had been elevated on that visionary pedestal, the girl had grown humbler and more humble. All that exquisite tender worship for her, all this watchful, never-slumbering care, observance of her smallest likings, remembrance of her most trifling words—What was she, that she should be treated as a princess of romance? Unawares, this elixir of life had penetrated through and through her. To lessen herself by any thoughtless word or act was a thing she had never feared or even thought of; but to lessen her husband's ideal Isabel, the creature he believed in, was not to be done, whatever sacrifice it might cost the real Isabel, the tender impostor who was training herself unawares into the dream-woman whom he loved so much. How we should all improve, if we were tried in that same way, instead of by the way of doubts, and jars, and contradictions, and an estimate under not over us, as is the way of the world!

And now this was all over and past. Miss Catherine loved her almost like a mother; but after the first

shock was over, she would come and look with a certain disapproving eye at the languor of the girl-widow. "My dear, if you would but exert yourself a little," she would say, with a grieved yet half-reproachful tone. And Jean Campbell had given herself up body and soul to the service of her stepdaughter. She had left her own children almost untended at the Glebe, the highest devotion of which woman is capable, to give her whole time and care to the other child, who had been very undutiful to her by times, and not very respectful, and yet was "our Isabel"—but even Jean would shake her head and venture a remonstrance now and then, or, at least, show in her eyes that she noted, not admiringly but critically, and even disapprovingly, a hundred little matters in her stepdaughter's demeanour. When such a key-note is struck, it is amazing how soon the strain goes through a house. The very maids would remonstrate with sorrowful Isabel: "Eh, mem, if ye would but rouse up a wee." "It'll no do to fight against the Lord." "It's *His* doing, and we maun but up with it." "A bit turn in the garden would do you good." Even Kirstin and Mary now addressed her in such words as these. From her pedestal she had been brought down again to the ordinary level upon which, cut for the natural reverence due to grief, she would again have been only Isabel. And that first conventional regard for grief which moves all bystanders at the moment does not last long. Sympathizers expect the creature with whom they have grieved to take a little comfort from their sympathy, to raise its head, not too soon perhaps, but yet soon enough to do credit to those who have condoled with it; and make a very *fine* distinction between "proper

grief," and the pretentious sorrow which refuses to be comforted. Isabel's friends were very sorry for her in that she had lost her husband; but it did not occur to them that she had also lost her life; the peaceful harmonious, subdued existence which day by day was widening into a fuller content.

It was horror first which had stunned the poor girl, and then it was this sense of her existence lost, which prolonged the heavy dullness long after the time at which it might have been supposed to give way to some faint pulsation of returning life. Her youthful, light heart had been buried in the grave with Margaret; and now the sweet, calm, untroubled existence which had seemed to be her lot, was laid under the sod with her old husband. A strange fate for one so young. She seemed to have died and come to life again, and the second life was full of jarring noises, of painful strains upon her patience, and contradiction of her wishes. She tried to stop her ears, and would not hear them. Oh! how could she go on living? How could she leave the Manse, her husband's house, and go back to the Glebe, as if she were still the Captain's Isabel, and there had been no such strange year in her existence. It was not yet a year since she had gone a pensive bride out of her father's house. Was it a dream? And now must she wake up, and take up her empty days, her restless heart, her unsatisfied being, with Jean Campbell and the bairns? She could not rouse herself to do it. And yet she felt her old hasty heart rising up angry against the little interferences, the little dictations, the importunate advices, which assail the new-made widow.

Thus the winter closed in again upon the hills,

ping the closed Manse in all its mists and cloud
le the parish was contending hotly about the pre
e, Isabel shut herself up in her house, which wa
hers until his appointment should be settled, lik
ghost of what she had been. One of the maic
already dismissed, in preparation for the fin
king up. The gardener had gone some time b
And only the sorrowful young mistress, with he
w's cap on her brown curls, and desolation in he
t, and old Kirstin, who had been the minister
skeeper in old days, dwelt alone in the mournf
se.

CHAPTER IX.

"Does she know?" said Miss Catherine. Jea
pbell had come to her, as she now often did wit
e scrap of news or matter to be consulted ove
erning Isabel, notwithstanding that the old lad
her almost daily. They had been having a
ious confabulation over some matter which ha
ght the tears to Jean's honest eyes, though he
th was quivering with a smile; and Miss Catherin
had wiped her glasses. They were laying the
ls together, two kindly conspirators, over the fo
s of the melancholy girl. It was already thre
ths after the minister's death, and according to a
onal prognostications, Isabel, who was not to ca
ove with her husband, as they both believed, ough
ave been able to hold up her head a little, like
after a storm.

"She's that innocent, I canna tell," said Jean, "
Kirstin that spoke to me, and our Margret, yo

see, was one that would never have a word spoken before her young sister. There's scarce a wean on the Loch but knows mair of such things than she does. But, eh, it would be an awfu' comfort to her heart."

"One would think so,—one would think so," said Miss Catherine; "but I never would say with the like of Isabel. She's not just like other folk. She has aye puzzled me from her birth. Not but what I am fond of her, very fond of her, but——"

And the old lady shook her head. She had never shaken her head at Isabel as long as Mr. Lothian lived to throw the shield of his love over everything she said and did. Miss Catherine might laugh at the minister's fondness, but it invested its object with dignity in her eyes. But now that shield was withdrawn, and the old position was resumed. "But I think she should be told,—and told soon," she added, ending her sentence as she did not mean it should end.

"But she canna fail to find out herself, by-and-bye," said Jean. "She's that innocent, like the babe in the cradle—but still the time will come when she must find out for hersel."

"But we'll not wait for that," said Miss Catherine, peremptorily. The announcement made to her had been such a one as goes to a woman's heart, and it involved many preparations to make, and an event to look forward to—something which should break the monotony of life, and bring a new interest into it. This, after all, is the thing which keeps life alive, especially in the country and among women. That there should be something to look forward to,—something going to happen, which cheats the days along,

l makes flying-bridges over the flats from point
nt. And the possibility of a new event was doub
portant after the overwhelming character of the la
s Catherine was so disturbed by the news that s
scarcely capable of going about her ordinary c
ations; and, at a very early period, much earli
n the usual afternoon hour at which she made h
its to Isabel, put on her bonnet and set out. S
s so full of it that she could scarcely restrain h
from repeating the news to her own confident
id, or even pausing in the village to get sympat
n some one; and indeed Jenny Spence waylaid h
l came out to the door to ask for the young wido
whom the whole community felt an interest whi
s not impaired even by the excitement about t
sentee.

"How is she the day, Miss Catherine?" said Jenn
a general way we hear through Jean; but eith
's no been at the Manse this morning, or she we
ne by the braes."

"Very likely," said Miss Catherine, "Mrs. Lothi
just in her ordinary as far as I can hear."

"Poor thing," said Jenny, "and they tell me s
ma be got to rouse up or take an interest in an
ng. Eh, what an awfu' pity there's no family, n
thing coming to take up her thoughts!"

And when she uttered this crafty speech, Jen
d her eyes inquisitively upon the old lady, with
k of a woman whose suspicions are aroused.

Miss Catherine blushed. She felt the burden of h
et. "I've had no conversation with her on t
ject," she said, struggling with the temptation;

don't think she has opened her heart to anybody, nor indeed if there's anything to tell."

"If *you* dinna ken, Miss Catherine, naebody can ken," said Jenny, with a marked pause intending to express polite but somewhat reproachful incredulity. And then she added, "Ane can never tell if it's to be desired. She's but young, and she'll get another man; and if there was any family——"

"Whisht, woman, whisht!" cried Miss Catherine; "the minister's grave is scarce green yet, and how dare ye talk of another man?"

"I was meaning no offence," said Jenny, thus suddenly pulled up in her anticipations.

"No, I don't suppose it; but if you could see that poor thing's melancholy face—— However, you must not build any fancies on what I've said," added Miss Catherine, "I know nothing,—not a word has she said to me."

"As if Kirstin was a wean and couldna tell!" said Jenny to herself, as the lady of the Manor passed on; and, indeed, it was apparent that Kirstin's communications had been tolerably general; and by the time she reached the Manse gates, Miss Catherine had become weary of the significant questions put to her. "How is Mrs. Lothian th' day?" "I hope she's beginning to take heart a little." "Eh, she should think there's mair to consider than hersel."

"Poor thing!" said Miss Catherine, driven to bay, "it is that that makes it so hard to rouse her. She has neither mother nor sister, not a creature belonging to her; unfortunately she has nobody to consider but herself." And with this speech which made an end to the controversy, the old lady hastened on.

"Can she no have heard?" said the women at the doors, looking at each other with puzzled looks. There was a little consternation among them lest their information should be inaccurate; but they ended, as Jenny had done, by the reflection that Kirstin was a woman of experience, and knew what she was speaking of, and that they had only the earliest knowledge of the fact—a thought which gave satisfaction to their souls.

To Miss Catherine's great astonishment, Isabel was in the garden when she reached the Manse. The young creature, in her gloomy dress, with her pale face surrounded by the snowy-white background of her cap, was seated by the window on the little terrace. It was a grey September afternoon, with now and then a burst of pathetic sunshine from the edges of the clouds—pathetic, because so often vanquished by blasts of rain—and mountainous piles of cloud heaped up upon the sky. Isabel sat full in the light, like a pale saint. The flowers in the borders were still bright; the mignonette lending a soft perfume to the air; the fuchsia branches all waving with their graceful bells. Before her the Loch lay somewhat leaden in the changeful light, a dark cloud interposing between it and the sun; and the horizon was low upon the hills, rain hanging round their skirts ready to come down at a moment's notice. It was a day full of the unconscious moralizings of nature—light one moment, gloom another. Isabel started when she heard the click of the latch. It was hard for her, even now, to believe that it was not the minister coming peacefully home. But instead of sinking upon her seat again, she turned to meet *her friend, and going* up to her with a step

unconsciously changed in its measure, stopped just before they met, looked at her with a strange, wavering, unsteady smile, and then threw herself into the arms which were opened to receive her, and fell into a passion of tears upon Miss Catherine's shoulder. The very tears were different—not the dew that would gather in her eyes unawares, but a hot, eager flood, full of new life. One or two whispers were exchanged between the two women, as they stood thus clasping each other, the exquisite fitful light flooding the whole world about them, and the silent house with its open windows behind. Mary and Elizabeth over again—always under so many changes of circumstances the same old scene.

But it was a long time after this—almost Christmas—when Isabel's baby was born. After that interview with Miss Catherine, the young widow began to raise herself up, like a daisy that had been crushed under foot. There was a little faltering and effort to shake off the heavy weight of dew, and all the soils of earth and the grave; but gradually the delicate head raised itself, the faint rose-tint came back, the bowed-down form grew erect. She had lost all that had come to her by the mere fact of being a wife; but something else was in store—another existence, a new dignity. She waited for it through the winter, with a pensive patience which touched the very heart of the country-side. Before the event occurred, she had removed out of the Manse back to her own cottage at the Glebe, and the women "at the doors" were all in a state of flutter and agitation, lest the trial should be too much for her. But Isabel, with her new strength, did not feel the trial. Her eyes were turned from the past to

he future. It did not grieve her, as they all thc
t would, to see the new minister come in and
ossession—he, and his wife, and his heaps of chil
Perhaps she had never loved her husband so mu
he did in those days when the first mourning for
as over; but her love was the love of a child
ather. Was not he the father of her inexpre
opes—of her perfected nature—of all the highe
he had ever known? And her eyes would fill
ears at his name; but the tears ceased to be l
or one's heart does not break over one's father's g
One weeps—and the world goes on—and one l
o smile.

So it was with Isabel. By degrees, and u
eciously, the feeling came to her that her child
ers only,—a miraculous gift, the very blessin
Heaven embodied. She did not even feèl, a
many women do under such circumstances, the an
of the thought that there was no father to wel
little Margaret into the world—to protect the hel
creature. Was not she herself there with her
come back to her, life running warm in her veins
uch strength as she never felt herself possesse
before? All the clouds seemed to roll away fron
when the child came. There was the one awfu
collection in her mind indeed which nothing
ever blot out—and there was the soft sorrow, na
grief falling into tender regret, for her husband a
a father. But her child was more to her than its f
had ever been. He had but cherished, elevated,
hipped her; but here was something which she i
urn could worship and cherish, and make ir
onder of grace and loveliness. To be loved is

—but to love with the utter abandonment of a young mother's passion is more. To give is, if not more blessed in this particular, at least more profound and absorbing than to receive. It was the great mystery of nature all over again, though Isabel was unconscious of it. Her husband had given to her the full devotion of a mature, experienced soul, which neither age, reflection, nor philosophy, could fortify against a love more deep and as ardent as that of any boy; and she had given him a soft filial tenderness, a mild affection, in return. And now Isabel lavished all her wealth of passion upon a child who as yet was incapable of giving her anything in return. Thus love's divine vindication of itself from all charge of egotism or selfishness was repeated and carried on; but the young mother was not aware of this. To her her infant's cooings were a celestial recompense for all her pain, just as it had been the supremest gift of Heaven to Mr. Lothian to have his Isabel, soft, unimpassioned, tender creature, to answer all the ardour of his love with a timid smile and a half-concealed sigh.

Even the Glebe Cottage put on a different aspect with the coming of the new life. The grey parlour, which was so full of memories, the room in which Margaret had died, in which Isabel had been married, and which under other circumstances would have been an awful place to return to, in the renewed and deepened gloom, was all a flutter now with the white robes, the baby-paraphernalia, all the scraps of lace and heaps of muslin in which young mothers find so much delight. The place was metamorphosed and knew itself no longer. It was the centre of a hundred sweet consultations, such gossiping, in the true sense

f the word, as renews the female soul. Even l
Catherine was transfigured by the new event. "I h
otten a grandchild in my old age," she said v
ears and smiles as she carried little Margaret into
arlour where one of Mr. Lothian's old friends st
aiting by the white-covered table to baptize
atherless child. It was one of many scenes wh
ere heart-breaking in their pathos to the bystand
ut did not somehow bear the same aspect to the p
ipal actor in them. The old clergyman who
rmed the ceremony broke down in the midst o
He was a grandfather himself, and had not hesit
year ago to make many a kindly joke upon Lothi
afatuation. But the sight of his old comrade's cl
hich would have been the crown of his joy,
hich he had not even been permitted to know of,
ore than the good man could bear. And the Dom
ho was standing by, turned quite round and lea
is grey head upon the wall, and could not supp
he groan which came out of his heart. And l
Catherine and all the women wept aloud. But Isa
ith her child in her arms, smiled in the midst o
heir tears. Her eyes were wet, which made them
he brighter. The excitement of the moment in
eak condition had quickened all the tints of lily
ose in her soft cheeks—the golden life-gleam in
rown hair shone out under her cap like a conce
rown. And she smiled upon them all with a cer
onder at their emotion, facing life and fate and
hat could come out of the unknown, tranquil with
easure in her arm.

"Poor thing!" the Dominie said; "poor thin
ying one hand on the mother's young head,

looking down from his great height upon the child, his harsh face all working with emotion. He had hard ado not to weep like the women, and to keep down the climbing sorrow which choked him, in his throat.

"Why poor thing?" said Isabel softly, looking up to him, "why poor thing? She has me."

"And you are but a bairn yourself," said the Dominie, with his broken groan.

"I am her mother," said Isabel, "who had I but Margaret? and Margaret was only my sister. And I am young and strong. She has me!"

"My dear," said the old minister, who with all his sympathy could not let such a speech pass unrebuked, "she has her Father in heaven. She has the Father of the fatherless. You must not build on your youth and strength. Have we not all seen what awful change and overturn may happen in a single day?"

And then Isabel looked up at him with her tear-dilated, smiling eyes. It was cruel to thrust back upon her at such a moment the terrible tragedy in which she had such a part. But even that did not discourage the young mother. Two great tears wrung out of their fountains, as if her heart had been suddenly grasped by some harsh hand, dropped from her eyes. Before they fell she had already turned her head with a little start, that they might not drop upon the child. "I'll live for her," she said. "Oh I'll have strength for her,—God would never have me leave my baby alone in the world." And then the smile came back,—an invincible smile, not to be quenched by any discouragement. When she was left alone even, and had no longer that stimulus of self-defence and resistance which came natural to her character, in the silence she

still kept her smile. There, where Margaret had c
—where she herself had stood up in her white sir
city of maidenhood to be married, she sat by the
perfect light of the fire with her baby asleep on
knees, and defied all fear and sorrow. All the fi
lous thoughts of youth had died out of her (so fa
she was aware) as much as if she had been Miss
therine's age. No longing for any love beyond
one she possessed was in her heart. Her sister,
her husband, whom she could scarcely dissociate
the one from the other, had left her on the way.
did not this make amends,—this which no one c
take away, which was altogether her own?

"Has the lassie no heart?" said the Dominie
he attended Miss Catherine down the brae. His
was sore for his friend. The minister had been to
a profounder loss than to Isabel; the solace of his
his companion, the occupation of those evenings w
were all that remained to him to enjoy in this w
had all gone with Mr. Lothian. And to think
friend could have thrown away all his love on a
sensible woman who could smile over her baby,
forget him so soon! "This time twelvemonth he
planning where he was to take her,—how he w
please her; and now——Have women no hearts?'

"Her heart is full of her child," said Miss C
rine, with a touch of personal compunction, for
too, had been thinking of the baby, and not o
father. "You forget—she was fond of him, and g
ful to him, but she might have been his daughter.
was not love like—what was thought of in my da

"Or in mine," said the Dominie.

What the two old people thought in the pause

followed, it is not for us to expound. Surely the world had changed somehow since "my day," was colder, less real, less true—and life was growing more and more into such stuff as dreams are made of. But that perhaps was because to both of them,—old unwedded, inexperienced souls, the half of life had never been any more than a dream.

"You must not think ill of Isabel," said Miss Catherine, after a pause. "Until this hope came to her, she was heart-broken enough, poor bairn! And now she is all for the baby. Had the father been living and well, she would have forgotten his existence in the presence of that child."

"And that's why I ask," said the Dominie, with bitterness: "Have women no hearts?"

"Some of us," said Miss Catherine; and they walked on together along the head of the Loch without exchanging another word. Curious, we repeat, to imagine what thoughts upon this subject, which belongs to the young, could be passing in their old maiden souls. Whatever their ideas might be, they did not communicate them to each other, but walked on side by side, with a secret panorama before them of two lives which were almost over, and to which no one but themselves possessed the clue. They were old friends, and thought they knew all about each other; but neither had the faintest insight into that vision of the past which each saw as they walked side by side along the habitual path.

But it was not the past which occupied Isabel, as she sat, in the firelight, with her baby on her knee. It was chiefly a soft respite from all pains and cares, the sense of ease, and weakness, and repose in the

present. And whether it was feminine insensibility, as the Dominie thought, or absorption in her new treasure, or the want of any real love towards her dead husband, certain it is that no longing for him or for any one was in her mind. What she had was enough for, and filled her up. To find herself, a shipwrecked creature, tossed from one woe to another, finding calm but to lose it again,—disappointed, sorrowful, and bereaved—to have suddenly floated once more into this safe, sure haven, so warm and still and satisfying and full of hope, was such a wonder and blessing as silenced all other thoughts. But for the child, what a desert her life would habe been! And with the child, was it not a rich garden, to be filled with flowers and fruits and everything that makes existence lovely? Such were her musings, as she sat by the fire, a soft, weak, helpless woman, tired if she went two or three times across the little room, but, nevertheless, fearless to confront life and all it could do to her, no longer languid or discouraged now that she had, not only herself to care for, but her child.

"My bonnie woman!" said Jean, coming in, "you mustna sit there and think. Ye've been real brave, and kept up your heart wonderful; but you mustna think, for her sake as well as your ain."

"I am not thinking," said Isabel, softly, and for the moment there sprung up in her a certain wonder at her own insensibility. Was she really insensible, unfeeling? She was not moved as they expected her to be. Things that she was encouraged to be brave for, as "a trial," proved no trial to her. Was it that her heart had sunk *into coldness?* And yet was it not full

of love that ran over and filled every crevice of her being, for the baby on her knee?

"Tell me, was this your feeling when *they* were born?" she said, with a little movement of her head towards the other part of the house in which Jean's children were; "that nothing mattered any more—that you could bear everything and forget what it was to grieve, and work and toil and never tire—was that your feeling, too?"

"Eh, I canna mind what was my feeling," said Jean, shaking her head, "except that I was awfu' glad it was over. But your father was living, Isabel, and I had no need to take that thought—and besides, I was different from you."

"Ah, my father was living!" said Isabel, with a little gasp, stopped short by the words, although even then she did not apply them to herself with any feeling that her case was harder than that of her stepmother. If it was harder it was sweeter, too, for her child was all her own.

"Awfu' different from you," said Jean; "ye can sit still and put a' your bit fancies together, you lady-things that are above common folk; but what I was thinking was, how to get weel and be stirring about the house to keep a' right for the Captain, and Margret, and you. My weans were what I loved best, I'll no deny it—but they werena my first thought; I had to think of *him* first and the house, and how to please ye a'; and syne took the wee thing to my breast for a comfort. There was aye the work that came first—and may be when a's done it is the best way."

"You think I'm idle," said Isabel, with a faint blush, "but you shall see how different it will be. I

was thinking we might build something on to the
tage—another room, or perhaps two. We have pl
now; and by the time she grows up—"

"Oh, Isabel, ye're like a bairn with a new
let the poor infant take a grip of her life before
think of the time when she'll be grown up. Ye'
for a man to her next."

"Oh, no, no man," said Isabel, with a little sh
"what should my baby want with a man? She'
mine as I am hers—my only one, all I have in
world."

"You're little better than two weans together,"
Jean, looking pitifully down upon the mother and
and drying her eyes. Two-and-twenty, that was
girl's age, with half a century of life still before
all its stormier, harder part, the heat of the day
the burden. Could she go through the world as
thought, with no wakening of other feelings in
heart,—altogether wrapt in this motherly virginal
sion for her child? "She'll be but a young woman
when the bairn is twenty," said Jean to herself
the eminence of her own more advanced age. Su
thing was possible as that the heart thus thrown
the strain should never diverge, nor throb to any
such. It was possible. But the woman in her
perience sighed over it, and dried her eyes with
apron, and softly shook her head.

CHAPTER X.

THUS life went on for months over Loch Diar
The minister's dreadful end had fallen into gentle
tfulness. Another minister was now the referee

head and butt of the parish, discussed in the sm
criticised at "the doors." And he and his wife
been asked to dinner at the neighbouring cou
houses, but not with so much success as had atte
the *début* of Isabel—and had called upon Mrs. Lot
"the last minister's widow," as the present femal
cumbent described her, and had not known very
what to make of the girl in her close cap, smiling
her baby—with her strange surroundings, and cu
nondescript position. Mrs. Russell, the new mini
wife, asked with a good deal of perplexity, "Is t
lady? I know she is a great friend of Miss Cath
But everybody knows Miss Catherine is very
Dined at the Marquis's in London, and went t
Opera with Lady Mary! I can scarcely believe
How could Lady Mary, an unmarried girl, take
body to the Opera? She does everything for that
herself,—no nurse, nor anything like a nurse; in
I am not sure there was any servant at all. The w
I saw in the kitchen was her stepmother, I hear.
turally it is not very pleasant for us to have the w
of Mr. Russell's predecessor in such a position.
course I would like to be kind to her if I c
but—— And then the way the people speak of
For one that calls her Mrs. Lothian, there are h
dozen that say just Isabel, or Isabel at the Gleb
the Captain's Isabel, or some country name like
I can tell you it's very embarrassing for me."

This little statement, which was made to Mrs. C
bell of Maryburgh, the nearest clergywoman of the
trict, and to Mrs. Diarmid of Ardgartan, and ev
the doctor's wife in the parish, got into circul
through the malice or amusement of these ladies,

roused a little flutter of indignation on Loch Diarmid, where Isabel's position was so fully understood, and where she was known beyond all controversy to be a lady born—whereas of Mrs. Russell herself nobody knew anything. But it did not disturb the quiet at the Glebe, where Baby Margaret reigned supreme, shutting out all the outer world with her small presence, her quick coming smiles, the gradual "notice" she took of the external world to which she had come, her first recognition of the devoted vassals about her. Her first little pearly tooth was a greater event than the Reform Bill, which happened somewhere about that time; and it may well be supposed that the first time the small princess visibly indicated her knowledge and preference of her mother was more to Isabel than if the Queen had called upon her, much less Lady Mary. The cottage was all absorbed and wrapt up in the child for that first year of her existence. On the whole, perhaps, it is no great testimony to the female intelligence, that it can thus permit itself to be swallowed up in adoring contemplation and tendance of a helpless, speechless infant, with no intellectual existence at all. I despair of being able to explain the phenomenon to the other half of the world. But yet it is quite real and undeniable. A woman with brains, and thoughts in her head, with sympathies as quick and wide as are likely to be found in human kind, with open heart and intelligent mind, is quite capable of absorbing herself, retiring into the little being of a baby, finding in the mere operations of washing it and dressing it, and singing it to sleep, and talking nonsense to it awake, a delight more exquisite than can be given her by all the arts and all the *pleasures* of the world. It is not

that she is content and pleased to do her duty, but those nursery episodes are sweet to her inmost and that, when unrestrained by the necessities of she gives herself up to them with passion, fi every little detail delicious, and resigning her intellectual being, all her loftiest aspirations t rosy, round-limbed, babbling, little fetish before she worships. So it is, and who can tell how it c about. Her mind might be a blank for anythi matters to the object of her adoration; her time frittered away in the most trifling of occupations; every moment is filled up, her sleep broken, cea attention demanded—and she is, as it were, in he Foolish female creature! what can universities d a being always ready at a moment's notice to surr herself into voluntary idiocy like this?

Such was the condition in which Isabel spen greater part of the following year.

> "Her old remembrances went from her wholly
> And all the ways of men so vain and melancholy."

She lived for the child, and was as happy a angels are in heaven; taking no thought for the f nor of the past, but living in the sweet present, developed daily a new smile, or a new dimple, new capacity (she thought) in Baby Margaret. one has the delight of discovering one day that idol can grasp and hold the glittering toy held o it; and on another that the rose-feet which se made only to be kissed, have found their proper and are good to stand on as well, what are al vulgar affairs of earth, or progress of external The little circle of bystanders round her stood gazed with a little wonder and much envy at Is

xcept the Dominie indeed, who, instead of envy,
he natural masculine balance of contempt. "A c
are that has been a man's wife, and companion,
dol," he said, "to sink to a maternal idiot like th

"Eh, Maister, ye had a mother yoursel!" said J
ampbell.

"And so I had, and a careful woman that bro
s up on her very life's blood," said the Dominie; '
ever went down on her knees that I ever heard o
a bit breathing doll. How a rational creature can
t is more than I can tell."

"But ye see ye canna mind when ye were
ast," said Jean. "A bairn in your arms is a winn
ling; even though it might grow up to be a grues
ean," she added, with a curious contemplation of
Dominie, "and no be able to understand."

"I take the compliment," said Mr. Galbraith, v
is broad, sudden smile. "And maybe, as you
's well for men that women are such fools. Bu
annot last."

"Eh, why should it no last?" said Jean. "
nly bairn,—the only flower in her life. I've seen
ke myself; if it had been a laddie, nae doubt t
ould have to be parted—but this one will aye be
other's companion, a genty thing like hersel."

The Dominie shook his head as he turned a
om the door. "It cannot last," he said to him
gmatically, as he went down the hill, and k
peating it till he met Miss Catherine coming
r in this first year of Baby Margaret's reign s
artier was always going or coming to her prese
umber; and even to Miss Catherine he repeated

sentiment, casting it in her face, as it were, in the vehemence of his dissent.

"What cannot last?" she said. "You mean Isabel; but it will. It's a silent life for a young creature; but she's content."

"I cannot understand you women," said the Dominie; "if she keeps content it is more than I can fathom. No—if her heart had been dead like the hearts of some—but her heart has never been right awakened; and if there was any word, say of that English lad——"

"Lord, preserve us!" cried Miss Catherine, holding up her hands in dismay; "you don't mean to say, Mr. Galbraith, that we're threatened with him back."

"I say only what I hear," said the Dominie. "They were saying in John Macwhirter's last night that he had been seen looking at the beasts on Smeaton's farm; and he should be well known at Smeaton's farm, if anywhere. There's a fine breed of cattle to be roupit."

"Oh, yes, I know all about that," said Miss Catherine, who had endeavoured in vain to secure some of the cattle in question. "Archie Smeaton's a worldly-minded body, and aye hankering after more siller. But to bring that lad back,—the only man I have any fear of in the world! No, no, it is you that makes me doubt poor Isabel. With her bairn in her arms there's no man in the world she would ever look at; we need not fear that."

The Dominie shook his head. "It may be nature," he said; "you should know better than me—but at three-and-twenty, to give up all your life to an infant, and never seek more in this world, is what I cannot

comprehend. If her heart was crushed and dea
might be so, but that is not the case. I am not sa
you are right or you are wrong, but it's very str
to me."

"And for one thing, she must not know," said
Catherine, with an anxious look in her face; "ne
you nor me will say a word to let her know?"

The Dominie turned away with a grim smile.
that is all your certainty," he said, "there's no
great difference between us." They exchanged a
more anxious words, standing together half wa
the ascent, and then Miss Catherine continued
walk towards the Glebe. But though she mad
effort to answer for Isabel, her heart was very
with the news she had just heard. That English
—he whom she had dreaded three years ago, an
whom she had prophesied that, being her first
Isabel would forgive everything to him. A ce
horror of him arose in her mind. "He has don
no harm," she reflected to herself, but the refle
did not bring her any comfort. She thought ove
the gossip of the district during the time he wa
Loch Diarmid, and she could not remember tha
had harmed anybody or done anything to justify
dislike with which he had been regarded. Other
lish lads had visited the Loch who had been pop
favourites—so that it could not be his nationa
Was it some subtle want of sympathy, some ger
ense of heartlessness and untruthfulness? But w
ver it was, the impression produced by him had
een a kindly or friendly one. And Isabel, afte
er trials, had glided into such halcyon waters—
soft tranquillity of content wrapped her life at

What evil spirit could have sent him back again, where he was so little wanted, to disturb a life just settling into permanent repose?

"You have heard of something that vexes you," said Isabel, when, after all due court had been paid to the little princess, Miss Catherine sat wearily down and sank into a kind of abstraction; and then the old lady roused herself up with a guilty start.

"Me!—no," said Miss Catherine; "what could I have that would vex me?—except just one thing, Isabel, my dear, if you will promise not to be frightened. There's measles about. Jenny Spence's second youngest —the one that was the baby——"

"But he's better," said Isabel, breathless. "It was last month he was ill."

"You can never say when they're better," said Miss Catherine, solemnly; "and I heard they had it up at the toll on the Kilcranion road; and if one of the Chalmers' bairns has not the whooping-cough, my ears are not to be trusted. But you must not be frightened. I was thinking if we were to take a week or two at the Bridge of Allan——"

"Oh, my darling!" Isabel was saying, with her lips on her baby's cheek, whom she had seized out of its cradle in her panic. Miss Catherine's guilty heart smote her, but she was not a woman to be diverted by a mere compunction from pursuing what she felt to be the safe way.

"My dear, you promised me not to take any panic," she said; "there is no occasion. You take your walks on the braes, and not through the village; and Margaret has never been so far all her days as the toll-gate. But just to keep you easy, and her clear of all

nger, I think you and me, Isabel, might go cann
ay to the Bridge of Allan to-morrow. It would
s both good."

"You would not say that, if you thought there v
o danger," said Isabel. "Oh, what would I do
ything happened to my darling?—Should I take
ay to-night?"

"There is no such hurry as that," said Miss C
erine; and then turned to confront Jean Campb
om it was more difficult to blind, and with wh
had been impossible to have any private commu
ion. "We are going off to the Bridge of Alla
e said, with a faint conciliatory smile; "we are j
aking up our minds all at once. A change would
abel good; and as for the child, babies are alw
s better for a change of air."

"And there's measles in the village, and who
g-cough," said Isabel, pressing her baby to
art.

"No such thing," said Jean. "Measles—Jen
ence's bairns had them, but they're all better
onth ago; and there's nae kink-cough I've heard
ween this and Maryburgh. Na, if it's for your pl
re, that's different. But eh! dinna tempt Pro
nce by getting into a panic when there's nae trou
ar."

"I think you're wrong about the kink-cough," s
ss Catherine. "There's one of Peter Chalmer
ys——"

"He's had that cough as long as I can mind," s
an. "Na, na, my bonnie woman, dinna you
red; there's naething catching in the parish

I'm sure to hear of it. Put down the bairn, a
her sleep."

"Well, I am of a different opinion," said Mis
therine; "and I'm wearying for a change. I'll
my maid, Marion, who is very experienced
bairns, and we'll start in the morning to-morrow
the boat. I cannot stay, Isabel, my dear. Ke
a good heart, and the fine air yonder will mak
look like two roses, the baby and you.——Lor
serve us, woman!" said Miss Catherine, turning
upon Jean, to whom she had made a sign to
her, as soon as they were outside the door, "cou
not see I had a reason? and was making you
enough to rouse a whole parish—if she had not
so taken up with the bairn."

"Me!—how could I tell?" said Jean, surp
"and I couldna find it in my heart to put her in
trouble, and it no true."

"Nonsense about putting her in trouble!"
Miss Catherine, energetically. "Perhaps you
like better to wring her heart, and bring in a
man to her, and turn all her peace to distress
more."

"What man?" asked Jean, seizing with i
penetration the point at question.

"Yon English lad!"

"Eh, me!" said Jean Campbell, "blessings o
for a quick thought, and a quicker act. I hea
had been seen over the hill. I'll swear it's the
cough!" she added, under her breath; and s
bargain was made.

It was the first night of pain Isabel had spent
her baby was born. It seemed to her as if she

to get up and fly away with her through the dark
to escape from so terrible a danger; and she
back a hundred times to the cradle after the little
maret had been disposed of for the night to liste
her breathing, and look at her little rosebud face,
touch her tiny fingers, and make sure she had
caught anything.

"The bairn's as well as ever she was in her l
Jean said at last, with a little impatience, as this
mess went on.

"But you said there was whooping-cough ab
said Isabel.

"I said it might be," said Jean, "for anythi
them; but, eh, why do you think our bairn should
it, and no other bairn a' the country round?"

"Because she is all I have in the world,"
Isabel, with a sudden fall out of the soft conten
which her life had been wrapped.

Jean did not know of the revolution which
moment made. She saw the brown eyes open
and flash in the soft, domestic light, but had n
light to perceive how Isabel had suddenly stum
as it were, against the limits of her lot, and wok
to see that her happiness was as a flower on the
of a precipice, that all her life was concentrated in
one blossom, against which nature itself, and the w
and the rains, and the summer heats and the aut
hill, were ready to rise up. Most mothers have
through that same sudden gleam of imagination,
beheld heaven and earth contending against the
a whose frail ship of life all their venture of happi
was embarked. Isabel saw herself standing as on
think of a more dreadful destruction than she had

dreamt of, and her very soul failed within her. It could not last. Before any new influence came in, the Dominie's words had proved themselves, though in a sense different from anything he understood.

"Oh, if harm were to come to her!" cried Isabel, with a sudden, low, stifled cry.

"Weel, weel," said Jean, in her calm voice, "that's what you're aye thinking as soon as ye hae weans. What if everything should gang against ye? What if trouble should come in a moment, and leave a' the rest, and strike yours? Ye mustna gie way to that, Isabel. What if the lift were to fa' and smoor the laverocks? No, no, my bonnie woman! It's no you nor me that can guard the bairn from whatever's coming, but just God—if it's His will."

"And if it were not His will?" said Isabel, driven from despair to despair.

"Then ye would have to submit," said Jean, didactic and almost solemn, "as you've done before. There's nae striving against God."

And then silence fell upon the little grey room, in which the fire flickered cheerfully, and the child slept, and Isabel's heart beat. It had been beating so quietly up to this moment, and now what wild throbs it gave against her breast! Ah, yes! God's will had to be submitted to, whatever it was—God's will, which had carried Margaret, twenty years old, to her bed in the churchyard, and laid the minister in his blood beside her. "Oh," sighed Isabel, "to be with them! to have everything over that must happen! to rest and know that nothing could happen more!"

"And mony folk would tell ye," said Jean, momentarily forgetting her compact with Miss Catherine,

"that to run away as soon as ye hear of trouble was tempting Providence, as if God couldna smite in the steamboat or on the coast, as well as in your ain house. No that I'm of that way of thinking," she added, hastily recollecting herself. "This change will do the bairn good, and it will do you good, and relieve your mind. Na, Isabel, ye must not take fancies into your head, or think that things are worse than they are. There's little Margaret the picture of health."

Isabel turned away, and threw herself down noiselessly on her knees by the side of her child's cradle. The baby's breathing was regular and soft; its hand was thrown up over its head, with the unconscious grace of infancy; its attitude full of ease and perfect repose. But how could any one tell? It might be like that to-night, and stricken with fever to-morrow; it might be blessedness one hour, and the next confusion, and misery, and death. Her very heart stood still as she looked at the infant's sleep. Oh, if God would but sweep them away together somewhere, it did not matter where—into the light of heaven or the sleep of the grave—anywhere, anywhere—so that she might not have to contemplate the possibility of parting with her child. But He was not so kind as that. On the contrary, was there not something in the Bible about idols which had to be crushed, lest the heart should worship them? or if not in the Bible, certainly in sermons such as all ministers preached? Was it not true that, when you loved anything too much, God might take it from you at any minute? and indeed lay in wait for you, to catch you at your happiest, and take away the desire of your eyes? He could smite in the steamboat or on the *coast,* as Jean said; and what if it

should be tempting Providence to go away? Thus Isabel questioned with herself, suddenly, in the twinkling of an eye, awaked out of her soft serenity and happiness, and plunged into all those fears that torture love. It had not needed the charm of another presence, such as they all feared. Nature herself had done it, shattering all the soft harmonies which herself had brought into being. Isabel, on her knees beside the cradle, could not even pray; she could but make an outcry dumbly—an inarticulate sound, like that of an animal in pain—remonstrating with God.

She lay all the night through with her child breathing sweetly beside her, debating the question with herself,—Should she remain, and put her fate into God's hands, and perhaps propitiate Him by such an appearance of trust? Poor child! she did not mean to be impious, nor to cheat Him with a semblance of confidence she did not possess. It was not her doing, but that of Love in arms, and terrified, which is always heathen in its panic. Would He be more likely to be merciful to her that way, if she placed herself before Him in the aspect of one willing to trust all in His hands? or was it more safe to go away and trust to "means" which were no in themselves unlawful? Or, if He saw her flying with her treasure, would He send a thunderbolt after her to punish her want of faith? Isabel's mind was full of such questions all the long night through. She did not sleep, but lay in the rustling palpable darkness, some times fancying the child's breathing grew hurried, some times that it stopped altogether, and looking all kinds of horrors in the face. She rose from her bed in the same uncertainty; and the day was cold, and Jean wavered, doubting whether such an uncertain and dis-

nt danger as that of the "English lad's" reappears as sufficient inducement for the immediate sacr manded of her.

"I doubt it's an east wind," Jean said, as she w to Isabel's room to call her; "I doubt it's temp rovidence;" and went about all her arrangem nguidly, with no good-will in them. "I'll put in r warm winter things," she said, as she packed x for them; "ye maun take awfu' care of cold. elling is aye dangerous, and at *her* age, the bonnie lam

"Oh, tell me," said Isabel, suddenly throwing ms round her stepmother's neck. "I am distrac inking one thing and another. Should I go, ould I stay——?"

Jean paused. She was put on her honour. It rd to part with the baby, and allow old Mar iss Catherine's maid, to get her hands upon it. e had given her word. And then "another m s something too frightful to be contemplated; abel was young, and had once loved Stapylton, ought she loved him. It was hard upon her s ther to be obliged to decide; but she did so ma nously for Isabel's good.

"It's no so cold as I thought," she said. "' nd's only in the north. It's no a warm wind, 's no dangerous, like the east; and if you keep ll and keep her warm, and no trust too muc arion, who knows nothing about bairns, no dou nge of air would do her good."

And after a while Miss Catherine's carriage c the door, and took the mother and the child aw

CHAPTER XI.

STEAMBOATS were novel luxuries in those days; but the West of Scotland was in the van of such improvements, and Loch Diarmid had secured for itself one of the earliest of those little fussy agents of civilisation and trade. The steamboat fretted its silvery bosom daily, opening up the world to the hill folk, to whom in former days, the means of descent to the ordinary level of humanity were difficult. The steamboat fusses its little way from point to point, touching at the little piers on each side of the Loch, and at less populous corners approached by boats, the universal means of communication throughout the district. The Lochhead was its terminus and starting-point, and the little party from the House were installed in the best places and received with that rustic Scotch courtesy which, though not deferential, is so cordial and friendly. It was the morning of a lovely day in spring, one of the softest of May days, when the sun had already begun to have some force; and on Loch Diarmid the east winds are never violent. Baby Margaret was as bright as a little rose, in her warm pelisse and bonnet, "noticing" everything that came under her baby eyes. And her bright looks, and the bright morning, and the novelty of the start, had restored Isabel's spirits and given her new courage. Scarcely a passenger entered the steamboat who did not come to pay his or her homage to the minister's child. And the little groups collected together and shook their heads kindly and said, "Poor things!" under their breath, looking at the mother and child, who were, indeed, anything but poor or open to

pity. "What would she do without Miss Catherine?—she's been like a mother to her," the women said to each other. And their conclusion was that Isabel's beneficent genius was taking her away to cheer her up and give her a little novelty in her life. "Eh! puir thing, I wonder if she'll ever get anither man?" said one. "If she was of my mind she would never take another man," said another; "one's bad enough." "But she's awfu' young to have nae comfort in her life." "Comfort! when she has her bairn." "And there's little comfort in a man if ye kent a'," said the moralist of the party. As for Miss Catherine, she wrapped her cloak about her and arranged her shawls over her feet, and felt like a general who has accomplished a most skilful and honourable retreat in the face of overwhelming odds. She was pleased with herself, pleased with the weather and with Isabel, and more than pleased with the baby, who crowed at her and recognised her as one of its belongings. Thus the steamboat went on rustling through the shining water, the hills rose in sight behind, the green banks sloped down to the edge of the Loch, the white houses scattered among their trees shone peaceful in the sunshine. There was not a house of them all which was not familiar to the two travellers. Miss Catherine remarked the stir that was visible about Ardgartan, and certain after-breakfast groups idling on the lawn, watching the steamer with the interest which every little daily event awakens in the country. "They have visitors, no doubt," she said; and Isabel was the one who found out that the windows were open at Ardnamore for the first time for months, and that some one was looking out from the gable window. "Can *they* be coming back?" she said,

with that familiar local knowledge, as house by house was passed by, which makes name or further identification unnecessary. Thus they went gliding along, alive to all the interests around them, when the steamer slackened its course opposite Brandon and waited for the ferry-boat. The ladies did not take much notice of the ferry-boat. Their attention was fully fixed on that figure still visible at the gable window of Ardnamore. It was a homely, old-fashioned, whitewashed house, standing high on the brae, with a steep green slope surrounded by trees, cleared in front of it, and the white walls nestling into the darker heather of the summit above. The gable window was in a projecting wing, and all the rest of the house was still closed, which made it more remarkable still to see a human figure there.

"Can they have come home?" said Miss Catherine.

"Oh, no—never that," said Isabel; "perhaps it is only the housekeeper. She might be putting the house in order for the fine weather."

"Or they may have had sense enough to let it, if they cannot take the good of it," said Miss Catherine; "it is a good house. There are—let me see—five, six, nine bedrooms, if I mind rightly; two in that wing, and one on the ground-floor, and the rest at the back, looking out on the hill. And the drawing-room is a pretty room, painted in panels, and all the length of the house. Oh me—if Magdalene Diarmid could have lived to see her only son wandering about the world as he is doing——"

"But that is better than what went before," said Isabel. Her eyes had been fixed on the house, which

eady began to grow dim in the distance, as
amer continued its course. And then she tu
r head, with a little natural sigh, thinking of A
d all that had happened since the two prophets
peared into the world. She turned round, think
nothing beyond that limited local circle, and, rai
r calm eyes suddenly, all at once encountered
her pair, which were gazing at her. She started
t it seemed to her the very vessel staggered
illed, and gave a low suppressed cry. For
ment "all that had happened," and even the c
e held in her arms, grew into a mist round Isa
e eyes she had so suddenly looked up into unawa
d which were gazing upon her with extraordin
ensity, were those of the man she had once lo
apylton, from whom she was, without knowing
ing, stood within half-a-dozen paces of her, on
row deck.

Miss Catherine heard the cry, low as it was,
t the start with which her companion made this
very; and turning round, saw, with feelings
scribable, the man from whose very shadow she
caping, standing by her, taking off his hat,
aiming recognition as an acquaintance. She g
le, and then crimson, with consternation and ex
ent, and in that awful moment ran over all the
bilities in her mind. Should she land at the
nding-place, thus betraying her motives to Isa
d proceed on their journey by some other ro
ould she turn back and go home, now the dre
eeting had been accomplished? Should she a
e claims of civility, or refuse to know him altoget
ut Isabel was a free agent. She was not indiffe

to the sight of him. Her start had been sufficiently evident to attract the attention of any bystander. He must have seen it himself, so near as he was, and with all his attention fixed upon them. Therefore, if it were but to shield Isabel, Miss Catherine felt that civility was her only policy. It cost her an effort to bow her proud old head in answer to his salutation; but she did it, taking the conversation and all the burdens of politeness upon herself.

"It is something quite unexpected seeing you," she said, "Mr. Stapylton; are you here on a visit, or have you come to stay?"

"I am going away," he said, half indicating with his hand a little pile of luggage. Miss Catherine ventured to take breath. If that were all, things might not turn out so badly; and she felt able to note his looks, and the changes that time had wrought in him. The first thing she observed was, that he was intensely pale, and that he looked at Isabel, in her mourning dress, with a trembling about the muscles of his mouth, and nervous movement of his hands, which betrayed some very strong feeling. Why should he be moved like that to see her, after abandoning her, leaving her to be wooed by the minister, showing no sign of recollection for all these years? And yet the indications of feeling about him were too marked to be unreal; and Miss Catherine, hard as she felt it her duty to be, could not but feel a certain womanish compassion for him in her heart.

"You can have made but a short stay, since we have heard nothing of you," she said; "you were at Archie Smeaton's, I suppose, over the hill."

"For some little time," he said, "and I heard from

m," lowering his voice, with a glance at Isabel,
d betrayed her recollection of him only by a sl
ovement of her head—"of many things which gri
e much."

Was this the old flippant, arrogant, unsympatl
English lad?" He had grown much thinner
therine decided, looking at him. His voice was
ued; the very lines of his face refined and alt
is aspect, long ago, had been that of a some
rdly, self-sufficient youth, careless of what anyl
ought of him, ready to meet reproval half way;
erything seemed softened, toned down, and impro
es, improved. She could not deny it to herself.

"Yes," she said, hastily, "there have been chan
t no doubt you would hear of the chief of the
e time they happened. We will not go over an
ry. You have been in distress yourself, if I ar
dge by your dress."

"Yes," he said; "my father is dead; but he ling
g after the time I left the loch so hurriedly. I
pt in close attendance upon him for nearly a y
e had a tedious illness. But for that I should l
turned sooner; and, I am sorry to say," he ad
y position is not quite so good as I had hoped.'

When he paused, inviting sympathy, Miss Cathe
und herself obliged to show some sign of inte
abel had not spoken. She was busy with the b
hispering to it, encouraging its play with old Ma
e maid, who had come to her other side, wit
rfect understanding of the position, "to take off
tention." But yet Isabel had betrayed that his af
re not indifferent to her. At this point she ra
r brown eyes to him with a questioning look, n

more significant than words. It asked, more plainly than her lips could have done, what it was, and all about it? And then the eyes sank confused—becoming conscious. All this pantomime Miss Catherine saw and noted with an ache in her heart.

"I have been in America this last year, looking about," he said. "I am cut off, if not with a shilling, still with a very poor remnant of what I ought to have had. What with my mother and sisters, and all the rest—But I cannot expect you to be interested in this," he added, looked at her pointedly, and then at Isabel.

"I am sorry you've been disappointed," said Miss Catherine. "I hope you have good prospects now."

He shrugged his shoulders and then he stretched out his hand for one of the folding-stools which stood about the deck, and sat down in front of the little party, commanding it. "I am thinking of settling in America," he said.

"I have heard it is a very fine thing to do," Miss Catherine answered with alacrity, "for a young man."

And then there was a pause—Isabel did not even look up this time; but her absorbed face as she arranged her child's dress, the nervous twitch of her fingers, her apparent blank of inattention, told their own tale to the anxious observer at her elbow. Did he observe it too? He did not seem to look at Isabel, but—"it cannot be for me he is coming so close, and staying so long," Miss Catherine said to herself.

"I had thought of Scotland once," he said; "I have let my own place; no chance of keeping that up at present—and if I could hear of a good farm——"

"Dear me, I would think that was a poor business for the like of you," said Miss Catherine: "farming

ikes no fortunes now-a-days. For a young ac
an, with no encumbrance, I would say America
e thing."

"I suppose it is," he said, with a little sigh; :
oked at Isabel with eyes that were almost wist
he took no notice of him. She behaved in ev
pect as Miss Catherine would have had her beh
d she instructed her previously in the matter, h
g up little Margaret to old Marion, taking share
e play, and when that was no longer necessary,
g her attention to her baby's dress, keeping her e
d hands and mind occupied. Just as she ough
ve behaved, but yet, in the very perfection of
duct, there was something which alarmed
ardian. The calmness was too elaborate, the c
sure too carefully put on; after the first start
d anxious look of her appealing eyes.

But it was clear there was nothing more to be m
f this. He pushed his seat away from them a l
i if owning himself discomfited. "And you are gc
ay?" he said.

"Only for a day or so,—only,—not for lon
an—to pay a visit," said Miss Catherine, feeling
rfare carried into her own country; and then tl
s another embarrassed pause. "You will excuse
am sure, Mr. Stapylton," she went on taking cour
But you see Mrs. Lothian has scarcely gone at
to society—I mean has seen nobody since—And
ll perceive that here in public, with all these
out, and seeing any stranger for the first time—

"I understand," said Stapylton. The sound of
me, *Mrs. Lothian*, had given him evidently a pai
ill. He rose to his feet when he heard it, and g

once more quite pale. Mrs. Lothian! Well, well, Miss Catherine reflected, to hear her called so, who had once been his Isabel, must have been hard upon the poor lad. She thought his lip quivered as he looked again at the young widow. And for her part, Isabel just then raised her eyes to her former lover. Tears were hanging upon their lashes, there was a look in them, which Miss Catherine could not entirely fathom. Was it a dumb sense of the terrible mystery of life which brought together in this way the two who might have been all in all to each other? or was it but an innocent pang of recollection, and half-conscious appeal to the sympathy of an old friend? Miss Catherine's heart began to melt over the two, as they looked at each other across that gulf. It was surely a gulf unchangeable, that lay between them; and in that certainty she could acknowledge with a sympathetic tear stealing to the corner of her eye that it was hard. He took off his hat and withdrew with a delicacy of feeling for which she had not given him credit. Was it possible that she could have done Stapylton injustice after all?

And he kept apart as long as they remained together in the steamer. When they were landing at Maryburgh he did indeed approach for an instant to make himself of use to them, but without a word or look, so far as she was aware, which a saint could have censured. She did not hear, it is true, the five words which somehow dropped into Isabel's ear when she found herself standing dizzy and agitated on the pier, "I shall see you again;" that was all. But Miss Catherine did not hear them, or perhaps she would have been less softened in respect to Stapylton, and

as satisfied that he was finally got rid of, and tc
en no more.

Isabel was a perplexity to her friend for all the
f the journey. Instead of the cheerful stir there
en about her when she started, she had fallen b
pon herself. Her eyes looked heavy, a *sourd*
lement seemed to hang about her, which her anx
ompanion could not explain. It was not the nat
ill of recollection which might have moved a yo
oman under such circumstances, she thought, bu
rtain suppressed painful tumult of mind to wl
iss Catherine had no clue. But for one thing,
as more absorbed than ever, if that were possible
r baby. She scarcely spoke, except to little Marga
o whom she pointed out everything, as if the c
ould understand her, fidgeting about her dress, fas
g and unfastening the wraps round her, inventin
ndred little occupations to fix her attention to
ild. She would not allow Marion, who had b
oking forward to the delight of assuming the mana
ent of the baby, to touch her, but left Miss Cathe
: once on their arrival to put little Margaret to l
Marion will do that; the bairn knows her," said M
atherine, but Isabel only shook her head. "Nc
nnot part with my baby," she said, and went av
rying herself with the child in her own room, wh
er a long interval, she was found hugging it in
ms, having as yet made no progress in its toile
hen Miss Catherine began to get alarmed.

"My dear," she said, "the tea is waiting. I ca
look at her in her bed, the darling! You're think
the time we were here before, Isabel. But you n

not give way to your feelings, and such a treasure in your arms. You must think of the bairn."

"And so I do think of her," cried Isabel, straining the child so passionately to her breast that little Margaret, unused to such violence, began to whimper with fright, and put out her baby arms to Miss Catherine. Then Isabel's excitement broke forth in weeping. She almost thrust the child into Miss Catherine's arms, and covered her face with her hands. "*She* turns from me too," she cried, with floods of sudden burning tears. And little Margaret, half for sympathy, out of an infant's strange forlorn consciousness of something unusual in the air, cried too, and the scene altogether became so painful that Miss Catherine lost heart.

"I cannot understand you, Isabel," she said. "There are no memories here to make you heart broken like this, and nobody is turning from you that I know of. I have come away with you myself, though I've plenty to do at home. And there is not one of your friends but would make a sacrifice to see you happy. What is the matter? You have always been happy with your baby. Why should you change now?"

"I have not changed," said Isabel, under her breath.

"I hope not, my dear," said Miss Catherine, giving back the child into her arms. "I suppose it is coming out into the world for the first time, and seeing—strangers; and coming to a new place. I would not wonder, for my part; but you have aye been so good, and so reasonable and patient—since *she* came."

"And so I shall be," said Isabel, hastily drying her eyes; "as long as she is well, oh, what can harm me? I want nothing but my lamb." And then she began, with a thousand caresses, to undress the little

weary creature, kissing its round limbs and dim
with a kind of passion. Miss Catherine sat lookin
somewhat grimly, not understanding this outbrea
feeling more than the other, but unable in any wa
connect either Isabel's tears or her demonstration
maternal adoration with that unlucky encounter in
boat. She did not understand, and she could
sympathise, but sat looking on with that grim ai
observation and criticism which winds an excited r
up to almost delirium. Isabel finished her task u
those severe, yet kindly eyes, growing more and r
agitated and nervous. She was in the state so com
to women, when tears are the only practicable u
ance. Tears, meaningless words in Margaret's
who could soothe but not understand, and such q
ness as she might have had in her own house, w
have composed her after the shock she had recei
but Miss Catherine's steady presence, restraining
tears and compelling a certain amount of external
control, prolonged the inward pain, and the eve
passed like a painful dream.

"It cannot be the recollections of the place,"
Miss Catherine to her maid, when Isabel had escap
her room, "for I cannot recollect that the poor min
was ever here; and it cannot be any fright abou
mairn. There's neither measles nor whooping-c
hat we know of in this place."

"And neither was there at home," said Ma
'Oh, mem, it's no for me to be the judge—but it's
lying in the very face of Providence and tem
God."

"I was not asking your advice on the subject,"
Miss Catherine, sharply. She was not, indeed, ir

way of asking any one's advice. But anger towards her old maid was impossible, and the next moment she had again begun to discuss the troublesome matter, talking not so much with Marion as aloud with herself.

"It's near a year now," she said; "poor thing! it would have been hard for her to have been at that quiet Glebe with nothing to take off her thoughts the very time it happened. The change will make it pass easier; the measles and the rest was but an excuse to get her away."

"And do you think, mem, she was that fond of the minister?" said Marion, with respectful scepticism.

"She was his wife, woman," said her mistress, indignantly; "what would you have more?"

"But, ah, far more like his daughter," said Marion. "Nae doubt it was an awfu' end; but when it's no just heart's love—— Do ye think there could be onything in the meeting with yon young English lad to-day?"

"What do you mean by anything?" said Miss Catherine, sharply.

"Eh, I wasna setting up my ain puir judgment; but I thought you looked a wee anxious yourself. And as for Mrs. Lothian, poor lassie, she was shaking like an aspen leaf——"

"Marion, I request you'll speak no more such nonsense to me," said Miss Catherine, with indignation. "What is he to her, think ye?—a stranger that has not been seen in the parish for three or four years?"

"And that's true, Miss Catherine," said Marion, with a cough expressive of much doubt and general uncertainty. Her mistress lost her temper, and immediately fell upon Marion, not on this subject, but on some other totally unconnected with it; but the ex-

erienced handmaiden was in little doubt as to
eal occasion of her wrath. "As if I didna ken
aptain's Isabel cared more for that lad's little fi
han for the minister and a' he could do for her!"
aid to herself, as she retired to her rest. Miss
herine was left with the painful sense that everyt
ad happened cross; that had she let matters a
sabel need perhaps never have seen this disturbe
er peace—that her peace *was* disturbed, whethe
im or by some working of her own mind, or by
ere effect of movement from home; and that even
wn maid penetrated her motives, understood the w
lot, and saw how fate had defeated it. And whe
s added to this that she had the discomforts of a str
ed and cold lodgings in which there had been no
iving all the winter, and was without the many
orts with which she was surrounded at home,
hich people miss when they are no longer youn
ill be perceived that Miss Catherine must have e
he day with cheerless sensations, aware that she
acrificed herself for nought, or worse than nought

It would be impossible to describe what Isa
ondition was on that same bewildered painful n
low was it that she had thus awoke all at once
er peaceful dream of a life devoted to her child,
his sudden conflict and tumult of all troublous thoug
he had been so calm, so serene, so tranquil be
iss Catherine's fiction woke her into wild alarm
er baby. And now even the baby had gone ou
s mother's mind. She kissed her little Margare
er sleep and wept passionate tears on her knee
he bedside, but it was not Margaret she was thin
f. And she was aware of this, tingling to the

tremities of her frame with the shameful guilty consciousness, that it was not Margaret she was thinking of, nor Margaret's father, nor her health, nor any of the limited subjects natural to her life—but of *him!* Oh, that there should be a creature in the world who could glide his shadow between her and her child! Oh, that anything could drive her back even to the very outskirts of that chaos in which she had once grown bewildered and almost lost herself! She sat over the fire and cried and wrung her hands for hours after Miss Catherine, with some groans of self-pity, had laid herself in the bed which she feared was damp. What was this awful external force which had seized hold against her will of poor Isabel, forcing her thoughts unwillingly into one channel, filling her with wild fancies, recollections, dreams, which took possession of her in spite of her struggles, fighting their way against all the fluttering forces she could bring against them. How could she help it? Had she known he was near her, she would have kept indoors, that she might not see him, instead of putting herself as she thought in his way by this sudden journey. She had been an involuntary innocent agent in it all; and yet it was she who had to suffer. To think she could be so mean a thing,—she! Mr. Lothian's wife—little Margaret's mother—as to be driven back to the distractions of her maidenhood in a moment against all the efforts of her will, at the mere sight of her old love! She cried bitterly, helplessly, in the silence over the dying fire. It was with no will of hers. Tears of guilt could scarcely have been more bitter than were those tears of innocence, or more full of trembling shame. She felt that she loathed herself for it. Little Margaret's mother!—

and yet to be moved by all this crowd of intru
fancies like a girl. And then she would find he
dwelling on his looks, his paleness, his emotion at
sight of her, his change of aspect. Oh, what w
all to her? And yet how was she to shut it out
her painfully throbbing, resisting, vanquished h
She had never even suspected the existence of
weakness in herself. Twenty-four hours before
would have smiled with the serene superiority of y
at any suggestion of such a danger. All that
ended and over, she had thought. Once she had
very foolish before reason and affection had mat
and completed her life; but now between the be
mother, and the foolish girl who once dreamed of
what a gulf was fixed? The mere fact of her ma
hood had been enough, she thought, to do it?
yet here was the giant back again, taking sudden
session, triumphing over every frail rampart she
put up, making a sullen, tearful, unwilling slav
her,—a slave struggling wildly, but unable to es
He looked so pale. She alone had seen the expre
in his eyes, when, glancing carelessly up, she had
lenly looked into them,—two dark seas of nam
unfathomable trouble. Perhaps he had been like
self, feeling it io be for ever over, feeling himself c
composed, serene, taking no thought of Isabel;
erhaps this strong man armed, the old Love of w
e had no fear had sprung upon him too, and mast
him in a moment, as had been her own case. The
ame slowly stealing over Isabel's cheeks, as she
ower and lower over the dying fire. It was very
—it was cold, and dark, and miserable—and the h
ras a strange house, and an unknown dark world

lying outside the windows, and it was the de night. And here she sat crying, helplessly feelin thoughts, and her faculties, and her own mind, away from her, and herself conquered in this str All so unforeseen too; nothing had even whispe her a warning of what might befall her. And shameful, so terrible, so guilty,—little Marg mother!—and oh, to find herself out capable of weakness and wickedness as this.

When Miss Catherine woke in the middle o night, still with the fear that the bed was dam put her shawl over the coverlid as a safeguard, gave a sigh which was almost a groan, and sa herself, "The Lord be praised, he's going to Ame But when Isabel, worn out with her struggle, laid self softly down by her baby's side, other words these kept fluttering in her ear, making her misc "I shall see you again." Oh, no, not if any p in heaven or earth could help it! She could not it. It would be better to take her baby in her a and fly anywhere to the remotest corner of the w

CHAPTER XII.

THE visit to the Bridge of Allan was anything a successful expedition on the whole. Little Mar took cold, and had a trifling illness, which filled three slaves with trembling terror; and Isabel wa much disposed, with unconscious superstition, to re this as "a judgment" on her own distracted thou and wavering mind, that she was not a pleasant panion to Miss Catherine, who, on the other h

blamed herself for her over-confidence in her own opinion, for exposing the child to bodily risk and the mother to temptation. Marion made no small amount of critical observations to herself behind their backs, thinking the child's illness also "a judgment." "Them that flees from the Lord, the Lord's hand will find them out," said Marion to herself. And the little party was not a happy one. They remained until after the anniversary of Mr. Lothian's murder, of which Miss Catherine was rather disposed to make a solemnity. Poor Isabel, with her heart still trembling for her child, and still suffering from the sharp assault of the new life which had taken her at unawares, found it difficult enough to force back her thoughts into the channel of the past, and feel all the grief, the heavy weight of recollection that was expected of her. She thought of her husband, and shed tears when she woke in the morning and remembered what day it was, and how tender he had been to her, and the dread difference there was between his peaceful going out on that bright June morning and his return. The scene came back vividly before her,—the handsome, white-haired man, ruddy and vigorous, mounting his horse at the door, and herself lingering about him, brushing his hat, arranging his cambric ruffle, with the brooch in it which was so mysteriously identified with his fate. And then the tramp of the men coming through the storm carrying him home. Isabel's heart contracted, and great tears sprang to her eyes. Oh, so good as he had been to her!—no one could have reproved her—could have carried her off from home risking her baby's health,—could have touched her heart with that sharp anguish *of the old love*, had he been there. These

were her thoughts before she saw any one in the morning, when she bent over her baby alone, and kissed little Margaret, and said, Poor child! poor child! that had never seen her father. But a whole day is a long time to continue on one note, however strongly it may be struck. Almost before she met Miss Catherine at breakfast, Isabel had exhausted all the emotion of which she was capable. She was serious, as remembering the anniversary; but she was not buried in grief as a widow might have been on such a day. She did not turn her face from the light and sicken at the sight of the sunshine. Her mind was fatigued and subdued by the real sorrow which had come naturally with the first thoughts of the morning. But she was not suffering acutely or moved by any actual passion of woe. It was natural, but yet Miss Catherine was vexed by it. Her sense of propriety was assailed. Such a day ought to have been spent in retirement, in tears, with closed shutters, or at least with the blinds drawn down. Yet it was evident the young widow felt capable of all her usual occupations, and was even heard singing little Margaret to sleep at the hour of her midday siesta. Miss Catherine was annoyed. It worried her to feel that her old friend was not getting his due, and that her young friend, who was still more immediately important to her, had not those feelings which it was becoming and fit she should have. She did not mean to be unkind, but she shot some little arrows at Isabel, half consciously commenting upon the difference in "some people's feelings;" and Isabel felt the reproach, and the little party in their lodgings, separated from all the wholesome occupations and interruptions of home, and thrown entirely upon each other, were not

happy. Isabel found herself even sighing for her mother, who would have kissed her and called her bonnie woman," and been glad to see her capal "bearing up,"—and for the peace of the Glebe. sometimes alas! would there not come a longing her mind to steal once more over the braes alo the darkening, to sit under the birch-tree, and si out of her own disapproval, out of her uneasy sou twilight life, and dim monotonous future, one hc dreams?

After the anniversary was over they went It was on a brilliant June day—a warm, lar breathless afternoon, when the steamer once carried them up Loch Diarmid. Miss Catherine self looked round her with an anxious air whe first stepped on board, involuntarily feeling th might be there again waylaying them. Isabel di look for him, but an excitement which she coul conquer took possession of her. It seemed to h that she was coming home to wait for him, and sooner or later, he must come to the place he knew s to disturb her life. And yet what could she it was her only home. But she was aware by in that he was not there. Their next meeting woul end in a few constrained words and distant s tions as their first had done. He would not, if he help it, repeat that experience—of this she felt As for Miss Catherine, her heart grew lighter she had scanned all the groups, and satisfied h that Stapylton was not among them. "Thank he is going to America!" she repeated to herself when relieved from this fear, felt restored to her lively interest in all that was going on. The m

of the Rue was in the boat, going home to his parish; and so was Mr. Diarmid of Rossford, on the opposite side of the Loch, "a distant connexion;" and they unfolded to her all the news of the district, while Isabel sat with her baby sheltered behind her veil, and still preserved by her recent widowhood from immediate encounter with the public. She heard what they were saying, but she paid little attention, and took no share in the talk; and when both the Rue and Rossford had been passed, and the diminished number of passengers bound for the head of the Loch, became distinguishable, she had but little heart for Miss Catherine's comments upon them. The Lady of the Manor recognized group after group, and speculated with Marion, as there was no satisfaction to be got from Isabel, upon their different errands. "There's John Campbell has been settling his son in Glasgow," she said. "I hope it will not turn the lad's head. They're a very pushing family. But I can't tell what the smith's wife should have to do so often in Maryburgh, wasting her time and spending her siller. Marion, is that Archibald Smeaton I see there at the other end of the boat? Go and ask him if the queys are all sold, and what price they brought; and here!—listen—ye can ask him," said Miss Catherine, aside into Marion's ear, "if yon Englishman is still about the Loch."

While Marion went upon this commission there was a momentary pause in Miss Catherine's talk—partly because Isabel was unresponsive, and partly because she was anxious as to the answer which might be returned to the last question. But her eyes were not the less busy scanning the shores of the Loch with that strange interest which a local notability takes in

every symptom of change that may have b
visible in his or her absence. She gave a sudd
clamation at one point as they went on, and
upon Isabel's arm, forcibly calling her attention.

"Look at Ardnamore!" cried Miss Catherine
a gasp of surprise. Isabel started and lifted her
The house was all open to the rays of the settin
the very door was standing wide open, and eve
pearance of inhabitation was about the place.
what was most wonderful of all was the apparit
a white figure fully revealed in the intense
standing on the green clearing of the lawn. The
were all so thick around, and the yellow, sl
sunset shone so full upon the green slope and th
figure on it, that it was difficult to pass it w
notice. All the windows were lit up with a gl
of illumination; the green trees were almost red
by the rays; the white walls of the house blaze
intensity of tone; and the one woman stood i
midst of it all, looking out with a certain w
lingering patience in her attitude. Perhaps im
tion only conferred upon this white figure, whic
too distant to be seen, the qualities of expectatio
patience. But the whole scene struck the tra
with a shock of surprise.

"And no one ever told me a word about it,"
Catherine said, with indignation. "Can he hav
the sense to let the house—or can they have
back? but then who was that?"

"It was Ailie," said Isabel.

"It was no such thing," said Miss Cath
"Ailie, indeed! My dear, you are thinking of
thing else, and you have not looked at her. T

the figure of a gentlewoman. They must have woke up to their interests at last, and let the house. An English family, I would not wonder. But even an Englishwoman can have no need to put on a moon-struck look like that."

"You are speaking of my wife," said some one at Miss Catherine's ear.

Like most people who live among their inferiors, she had a way of expressing her sentiments without any constraint of her voice or concealment of her opinion. She was a person of importance, and she was very well aware of the fact; consequently she started, and turned round, not well pleased, to ask the intruder what he meant by thrusting himself into private conversation; but was struck dumb, and all the strength taken out of her for the moment, to find Mr. John himself standing by her side. Isabel was roused and startled too. It was, indeed, her little cry of recognition which persuaded Miss Catherine that the apparition was real and undeniable.

"John Diarmid!" she cried, with a voice half choked with wonder and curiosity; and then made a dead pause, looking at him with a surprise too great for speech.

"You must beware how you speak of my wife," he said. "Yes, we have come home. I have brought her home—and she is no longer Ailie, but my wife. If you would be a friend to either of us, you might show an example to others, and not lead the way to trouble."

"Trouble—what trouble?" said Miss Catherine; "and why should I be a friend to you, John Diarmid, or set anybody an example to do you pleasure?"

"Why should you be a foe?" he said.

And then they both paused, and looked at ther. Mr. John's appearance had changed. It nearly three years since he had left Loch Dia with his wife; and the wild look of passion and ex ment which had marked the prophet had died out c face. But his appearance was more strange to h keeping eyes than it had been even when his face lighted up with that glance which was half insa He had acquired the foreign air which in those was given by a beard; and his dress, too, was for and there was about him that indescribable look v is not English, which has come to be conventio identified with the conspirator and revolutionary. had a great cloak on his arm—a Spanish cloak ca of being thrown around him after a fashion not ir sible in those days, though now identified with, a least, a Byronic hero. His dark face, so muc could be seen of it in the forest of dark hair darker beard, was more like that of an Italian th Scotchman; his aspect was that of a man full of wei cares and responsibilities. The wild inspiration c supposed mission had gone from him; but it wa only that he had lost that: something also there which the keen-sighted spectators perceived wi understanding, which he had acquired. He look Miss Catherine without flinching, but with no ex ment, meeting her eye calmly, and repeating wh had already said.

"Why should you be a foe? I am none to You might be a protection to my wife. Am understand that my sins have been such that you not forget what is past, and give your countenan

her? It might be a comfort to her," he said with a suppressed sigh.

"I cannot see what other protection your wife wants, John Diarmid, when you are here."

"But I am not likely to be here," he said, quietly. "I have many things on my hands. I am here to-day, and gone to-morrow. Poor thing! she is alone; her own friends are unlike her now. You saw her standing there——"

"You have made a lady of her," said Miss Catherine, with a half congratulation, half reproach.

"I have made her——" he said, and paused. "No, I have made her nothing; nought of it is my doing. It is another than I, that must bear the blame."

"Then there is blame to be borne?" said Miss Catherine. "John Diarmid, I know nothing about your history since you've been away; but if you've been unkind to that poor lass, after making her marry you——"

"My kinswoman," he said, with a faint touch of scorn not distinct enough to be called a sneer, "what I have done to her is of little consequence. It is God who has been unkind of her. Don't start as if I spoke blasphemy. *She* can see but one way of working——"

"Then I suppose," said Miss Catherine, vehemently, "you've given up the trade of prophet for yourself? I thought as much—and left her, poor weak thing! to bear the burden. And what is your way of working now?"

"You have no right to speak to me so," said Mr. John. "I have given up no trade; but I see it is by nations and peoples, and not by single men, that the

formation of the world is to be accomplished. W
ould I explain my views to you? You would
nderstand me. What I wish is that you would
ct her as a woman and my kinswoman might, w
am not here to do it."

"And why should you not be here to do your
ourself, John Diarmid?" said Miss Catherine. "
ave done her all the honour a man can do a wor
nd it's your place to stand by her now."

"Honour!" he said, and uttered an impati
eary sigh. "It might have been better for her
he never come to such honour." Isabel, who
een listening eagerly, though she had not spo
eard the exclamation which was muttered betw
is teeth, and in her hasty heart rebelling aga
iss Catherine's coldness, felt it was time for he
terfere.

"Mr. John," she said, "I am not just Isabel
hen you knew me—but Mrs. Lothian. I will g
lilie, and—take care of her, as much as I can, w
ou are away."

Miss Catherine turned and looked upon her
lmost as much consternation as if it had been E
argaret who spoke. And as for Mr. John,
rangest change came over his face. His large f
yes, in which excitement still lurked, though it
nlike the excitement of old, softened over wit
limmer as of tears. He went up to her, close to
s if it would have given him pleasure to lay his h
n her head, or her shoulder—"Is the child you
s said. "Tell me its name."

"Margaret," said Isabel, under her breath.

"I thought it was Margaret; God bless her!"

said, with something between a sigh and a moan; and then waved his hand and left them hurriedly, going to the other side of the boat, and turning his face to the opposite shore. Thus he left them as abruptly as he had come to them, leaving Isabel's offer of service totally unanswered. To him as well as to Miss Catherine it was as if a child had spoken; and Isabel's voice was like her sister's, and the deeper expression which had come into her face made the fundamental resemblance of the two faces more striking. It was to John Diarmid as if his dead love herself had risen up to offer her protection to the woman who was his wife.

"So, Isabel, you've taken Ailie under *your* protection? You are a married woman, no doubt," said Miss Catherine, with emphatic scorn; "but you'll not find it an easy task to introduce Mrs. Diarmid of Ardnamore in the county, you may take my word."

"Was I thinking of the county?" cried Isabel. "Oh, Miss Catherine, how can you be so kind and so cruel? I was thinking of her heart breaking, and her comfort lost——"

"Her comfort lost?" cried Miss Catherine. "The comforts of Janet Macfarlane's cottage were you thinking of? I am not so high-flown. It is plenty, I hope, for Ailie to have gained her purpose, and got herself made lawful mistress of Ardnamore, without exacting protection, which means introductions, from either you or me."

"Oh! you cannot think that was her purpose," cried Isabel, fully roused; but by this time the pier was reached, and Jean Campbell's anxious face was visible, looking out for the travellers, and all the familiar landscape opened before them. Isabel's atten-

n had been so drawn to other things that the s
home came upon her like a revelation. Ho
ich was it! Last time she had thus arrived, it
her return from her expedition to London, an
s to the Manse, shining yonder in the last bri
s of the sunshine, that she had walked, leanin
r husband's arm. Now, the Manse had other
ates and other interests, and she had no arm to
, either on that steep ascent, or on the stee
rder way of life, with all its diverging lines.
ps never before in all her mourning for him had
me profound throb of sorrow gone through Isa
art. Sorrow? no, rather regret. "He would
ve told me what to do," was the thought that we
p like a sob into her throat. She did not k
hat to do about Ailie. She meant—indeed she c
t tell what. All the greatness of her loss, all
se of want and deprivation which little Marg
d stolen from her, seemed to come back in that
nt. Had there been only that kind face with
hite hair to welcome her; that tender, strong
e a father's, to support her and his voice to tell
hat to do—what to do! She was not sensible
angely contradictory that longing for her husba
rection was with the real struggle which she d
erceived to be shadowing over her; indeed she
t stop to think at all, but only felt what ease,
mfort, and infinite relief, there would have bee
tting all doubtful matters into his hands, and b
d what she must do.

She was very subdued and pensive when she
tered her own home—the home which now was
ly shelter upon earth—her first, and, as she thou

her last dwelling-place. Not positively sorrowful, but softly and full of musings and melancholy thoughts. When the child was put to bed she went and sat by the window, and watched the lingering night out, through the long, long twilight, and sweet wavering darkness lit with stars. Oh, sweet nights! so full of suggestions of what might have been, so tremulous with all possibilities of happiness, so wistful and heavy with visionary longings. Twice had the charm been taken out of those soft twilight hours for Isabel. Once when the calm of married life—that calm which she had identified with marriage itself, the soft apotheosis of the real, and annihilation of all dreams—had filled her with a gentle tranquillity; and again, when Baby Margaret had poured the sweet absorption of new motherhood into all her veins, and made active service and endless adoration a delicious substitute for all visions. What was it now which had brought back to her the fancies, the vague longings, the sense of wonders and mysteries to come which had belonged to her youth? It was as if these two years had been blotted out of her history altogether. The shadow had gone back on the dial. The mother, the wife, the widow, had become a girl again. How was it? She was but three-and-twenty, and yet she wondered to feel herself back in that atmosphere of her youth.

But she had by this time grown so far accustomed to the change that it did not move her to the horror of shame and self-disgust which she had felt when the first thrill of that renewal came to her. She had been conscious then how it came. She had felt the tumult *rising*, and struggled vainly against it, and cried in her helplessness, and hated herself. These violent

notions had quieted down. Her heart had g
ubtle, and put on excuses to hide its movements
er. And the reasoning part of Isabel had g
ise too, and forebore to ask the questions whi
as so difficult to answer. And by reason of
autious policy, life had become more bearable.
nd permitted herself to float forth on the encha
ream of fancy, without pausing always to ask w
he was going? She had allowed herself to relin
hought, and to remain quiescent, wrapped in a
aze of indefinite sweetness. Ah, yes, life was
weet! And so were the lingering nights, and
ystery of the soft skies, and the whispers of th
ard-looking earth. No anxiety to get the ca
ighted, to go to work at Margaret's little wardro
o do up the little laces and ribbons, and fresh fi
or her idol—moved her. Once more she could
ent herself to do nothing—soft feminine evidence
eart to which its dreams were sweeter than any
non task.

"You're sitting in the dark," said Jean Cam
oming in. "Eh, Isabel, my dear, I canna bide to s
itting that idle, with nae light. You're thinking,
hat makes sorrow. I thought you were tired
your journey and in your bed, which would be a l
place."

"No, it is not sorrow," said Isabel, softly; "
he long day and the bonnie night. It is not
et, and I was doing nothing. Do you think s
ooking well, now you've seen her? and you've no
how she has grown?"

"I saw the difference before you were out o
oat," said Jean. "Bless her—the bonnie l

She's like a rose, and so she has aye been since the day she came into this world. If ever there was a bairn that brought a blessing——"

"You did not tell me when you wrote," said Isabel, hastily, "that Mr. John and Ailie had come to Ardnamore."

Jean had given a perceptible start at the beginning of the sentence, as if she feared to be questioned; but recovered herself as soon as she heard these names. "I scarcely kent myself," she said; "I wouldna believe it till I saw Ailie at the kirk. Eh, she's changed. Me that minds what she was——"

"Does she look—as if she were happy?" said Isabel, feeling her own voice flutter like a sigh through the dark.

"She looks—like a spirit; no like a woman," said Jean; "ye should have seen the folk how struck they all were. Some thought she would be giving herself airs noo she's come home to her ain, and some thought she would be currying favour to make folk forget, and some——"

"Oh, never mind what they thought," said Isabel, "tell me about herself."

"Eh, Isabel, you would have been struck! She was as white as a woman cut out of stane, and a' dressed in white, which was awfu' strange to see. She went no to the Ardnamore pew, but to her auld seat, and knelt down at the very prayers when a'body else was standing. But the strangest of all was the look in her e'en. You would have thought she had never seen one that was there in all her life before."

"But oh," cried Isabel, the tears coming to her eyes, "it was not pride."

"No, it wasna pride," said Jean; "there was hat said it was, but no one that looked at her ike me. I dinna like to say what I thought m There's been mad folk in the Ardnamore famil many a generation; but then Ailie's no one o Ardnamore family except by her marriage, and wouldna affect her; but——"

"I am going to see her to-morrow," said Isabe

"I wouldna if I were you," said Jean. Isabel, my bonnie woman! I canna bide to see have any troke with such folk. And there's stra about the parish I'm no fond of. I heard yeste of a man that spoke to young Mrs. Diarmid of Partan, and gave her an awfu' fright, and——u Miss Catherine would take you in her carriage. you in your deep crape! You canna go and visits so early. It wouldna be like you to sho little respect——"

"You have some reason more than this," Isabel, growing pale in the darkness, and falteri she spoke, for her heart began to beat and took her voice.

"Me! what reason could I have?—but just good, my lamb!" said Jean, with nervous volub 'but I'm no for you mixing yourself up with folk; and I'm no for you walking about the cou side your lane. There's a heap of Irish about, coming with thae weary steamers. You're no to b me, Isabel, if I am awfu' anxious, more an n your condition than if you were a bairn o wn——"

"But I see you have another reason," said Is 'am I such a bairn or such a fool that you wil

tell me? But I am going to see Ailie to-morrow, whatever happens; if you like you can come with me yourself."

"Na, it's no my place, as if I were Mrs. Lothian's equal," said Jean, standing irresolute by the table, tracing a pattern on the carpet with her foot. Little Margaret woke at the moment, which was a godsend to her. She had to be patted, and rocked, and sung to, ere she would go to sleep again. Jean escaped under cover of this interposition; but her face was full of care when she brought in the candles, flashing the light in Baby Margaret's eyes, who immediately opened those dark orbs wide, and made herself very broad awake, and had to be played with for ever so long before she would consent to sleep again. And Isabel was tired, and not to be disturbed with agitating news, and "put off her night's rest." Besides, what good would it do to tell her? But Jean's heart was heavy with thoughts of what might be coming, when she bade her stepdaughter good-night.

CHAPTER XIII.

The next day Isabel was too much occupied with her project of visiting Ailie at Ardnamore to be open to any argument or dissuasion. She put aside her stepmother's attempts to move her, with soft obstinacy. "She was never a friend of yours that you should be so keen about her now," said Jean.

"She was more to me than you think," said Isabel; and her stepmother's amazement was great.

"She was liker Margret than you; but far, far

ferent from Margret," Jean resumed, after a pau
nd you but a gay heedless lassie, no thinking
ih things."

"But I tell you she was more to me than y
ught," said Isabel.

This was all that Jean could extract from her; a
gave rise to many marvels in the good woma
nd and serious anxiety, which she could not expr
ih, if Ailie had anything to do with that Engl
," was the thought that passed through her mi
h, if she should be in league with him now!" I
could not surmount her hesitation about mentioni
ypylton's name to Isabel. "I canna do it," she c
sed to her gossip Jenny Spence; "maybe it's we
ye may say it's weak; but name a lad that ca
er her when she was a young lass,—to Mrs. Lothi
her widow's weeds. It's a thing I couldna do."

"I'm no that sure I would like to do it mysel
d Jenny; "but it should be done."

"He may not bide," said Jean; "or he may bi
d mind his ain business and no come here.
s never been near the doors, so far as I've heard.

"But he kent she was away," said Jenny, d
provingly. "And if she were to meet him, p
ng, about the road, without any warning——"

"Weel, weel," said Jean, in despair, "I wash
nds o't—I canna help it. She maun just take l
nce, like a' the rest."

"Eh, I wouldna have such a faint heart," s
ny. "I wouldna be that feared for a bit la
ugh she were Mrs. Lothian fifty times over."

"But you're no me," said her interlocutor, with

little offence; and to this undeniable argument nothing could be said.

Isabel had to leave her child behind, which was a novel thing to her, and very strange it felt to walk away alone through the village and down the other side of the Loch towards the steep lane that led to Ardnamore. She had gone nowhere except to Miss Catherine's, since her husband's death; and though she had gone about with all the freedom of a country-girl in her native parish before her marriage, since her widowhood she had fallen out of all the uses of social life. She was more shy than she had been at sixteen. When she found herself passing Lochhead and walking alone along the further road, it was strange to her. She shrank from the eyes of the stray passengers, and from the greetings of the village folk, with a sense of something unseemly in her own presence there, which she never had felt in her earliest stage of life. She was, as Jean said, "still in her deep crape;" her gown weighted with it, her bonnet black as night, with its great overhanging veil like a cloud. When the women at the doors eagerly claimed her acquaintance, and insisted on detaining her, to ask questions about Baby Margaret, and spend their own homely condolences and encouragement upon herself, she did her best to escape from them.

"I have a long way to go, and I must be back soon to my baby," she said to them, eluding all their importunities.

When she got to the gate of Ardnamore, it was the height of the warm languorous afternoon, and the air and the weariness had soothed her, and brought a languorous feeling into her heart. She was not excited

ilie, poor girl! Isabel, in her own heart, had ut a story for Ailie, setting her down as a d, melancholy wife, with a strange past behind a mysterious future before, no doubt; and yet much lifted beyond the range of ordinary ty as she had been in the old days. She ex- to be shown into the old-fashioned drawing- ith its bright windows looking out on the Loch, be joined by the mistress of the house, when l waited awhile, and to see Ailie's attempt to ntented, and to bear herself like the other ladies. approached the house, the garden and every- ound looked so everyday and ordinary, that all s extraordinary in Ailie's story gradually died her visitor's mind. She would be awkward, , in her new position; she might not even know receive Isabel's visit; but, still, no doubt three f absence and travel had improved her. And felt more and more as if she were paying an y visit, when the maid, who was just like other let her into the house, which was precisely like ouses. The deerskin mats at the door, the in the hall, the hats and plaids hanging about, ok something from her interest. She began to ilie, and think only of Mrs. Diarmid of Ardna-

drawing-room was a large, light room, rather the roof, furnished with old-fashioned, spindle- furniture, gilt and painted, and covered with overs, to preserve the fading damask below. A air of homely, pleasant, refinement, and of con- with the big distant outside world,—such as ishes so many Scotch country-houses of suffi-

ciently humble pretensions—was in this dainty, homely place. There were miniatures of ancient fine ladies, and officers in uniform threaded here and there in lines upon the wall; there were Indian curiosities about on the tables, far-travelled toys, elaborate ornaments in ivory, a splendid tiger-skin on the faded carpet—all so many signs of sons of Ardnamore who had served their country in various quarters of the globe. A dealer in old furniture would no doubt have despised the chairs and sofas, with the gilding half worn off them, and their pinafores of brown holland washed white with much care, and the old faded carpet which was covered with white too. But yet the room was one in which only gentlefolks could have lived. Isabel went in with a little gentle curiosity, seeing no one. She moved a few steps into the room, her eye catching the Indian inlaid work of a set of writing things upon a table, but not perceiving in the whiteness of the room a white figure seated just within the curtains at the bay-window, half hidden in the recess. Even when she did perceive her, Isabel stood uncertain, hesitating whether to go forward or to wait quietly apart till Ailie should make her appearance. For surely this was not Ailie—it must be some visitor, some caller—— But a strange sense of recognition stole over her after the first start. She stood in her intense blackness and gazed at the unknown being whose appearance was such a contrast to her own; and then there came at last a faint sound of a voice: "Is it you, Isabel?"

"Oh, is it you, Ailie?" she cried, and went up to her with something of her old impetuous manner. Yes, it was Ailie, and yet as unlike Ailie as fancy could have imagined. She was sitting against the wall with

appearance of any occupation—her listless h
ing in her lap. She was dressed in dead white,
ght muslin, but opaque white stuff, loosely made
se hanging loosely upon her worn figure. Her
s almost as white as her gown, her blue eyes
lated and wandering, her fair hair, which once
much pale gold in it, had lost its lustre. She
ke marble, but yet she was not like death. Sc
ing of movement, a thrill of wavering agitation
s, was about her, although she sat as still as if,
e Lady in "Comus," she had been bound by ench
nt into her chair.

"I did not see you when I came in," said Isa
I only heard of it yesterday; and so you've c
me?"

"Ay—I've come home."

"And you've seen your own people again a
ll," said Isabel, trying to adopt a tone of congrat
on.

"Ay—I've seen my own folk."

"And I am very glad you are back," said Isa
home is the best. But I never heard till yester
hen I came back too. How glad they would all
nd I hope you were glad too—I hope you
leased yourself?"

Ailie made no answer. She turned her head
way, and gazed again over the Loch. A little al
perceptible nod of her head was the only indica
he gave of having heard. And Isabel began to g
ervous in spite of herself.

"Will you not speak to me, Ailie? are you
leased to see me? I thought you would be ple
—and I would not lose a day. And you must l

heard," said Isabel, a little affronted as well as amazed at the indifference shown her, and instinctively producing her highest claim to consideration, "what dreadful trouble I have had since you went away."

The word seemed to catch Ailie's ear without any that followed or preceded it. "Trouble!" she said, vaguely, "what can your trouble be in comparison with mine?"

"Oh, I beg your pardon," cried Isabel, with violent youthful compunction, "you know I have heard nothing. Oh, Ailie, don't sit there and look so sad—tell me about it—was it your child?"

Ailie turned upon her her great wandering, dilated eyes: "My child?"

"I did not know," said Isabel, almost crying, "I thought you might have lost—a child—when you said your trouble was worse than mine."

"My trouble is worse than any trouble on earth," said Ailie; "and oh to come back here to look on the same place night and day as I knew in my dreams. I think my heart will burst—it's broken long, long ago," she added, turning away from Isabel, with a sudden pathos in her voice. It seemed a confession of unhappiness so open and undisguised, that Isabel was driven to her wits' end, not knowing what to do or say.

"Oh, Ailie!" she said,—"oh, Ailie, you should not say that now—I told you, you should not marry him——"

"Marry him!" said Ailie, with a faint wonder stealing over her face. "We are meaning different things, you and me. Ay—I thought I was wedded to the Lord; I thought He was sending me forth to do

His will. Oh, woman! what is your bairn or
nan to that? And it was not that I deceived my
he continued, rising into vehemence; "I neve
ceived myself. There was His promise, clear a
un in the skies. Could I no see all the wonde
he latter days? I saw them in myself; I spol
power; I rose up off my bed that might have bee
dying bed—and a' to be betrayed, and casten c
nd deceived!"

"Oh, Ailie," cried Isabel, wringing her h
"what are you speaking of—what do you mean?"

For the moment Ailie made no answer. She
turned her head to one side or the other—but
before her into the air, seeing nothing. "Your M
was right," she said, after a pause. "It's sweet
die—oh, it's fine to die. Christ died, Isabel. W
it's for us you know, and so it is for us, but H
to do it. Nae miracle saved Him; that's what
Margret said."

"But He saved you," said Isabel, in her awe,
her breath.

At these words Ailie burst into a few su
violent tears—a momentary paroxysm which
seemed totally incapable of controlling. "Wh
think it was some devil," she said.

"Oh, Ailie," cried Isabel, "this is not you t
speaking—not you that was always so good!"

"That is another thing," said Ailie, withou
apparent sense of reproof, "whiles that is what I
that it's no me, but some ill spirit in me. And t
I think I'm sitting here, I may be with your M
in heaven, throwing my gold crown before Hi
Oh, if it was but that! Sometimes at night the

sends such thoughts like dew,—if it is the Lord. But then comes the awfu' morning, Isabel Diarmid, and I open my eyes, and my heart cries out,—He has broken His word."

"Ailie! Ailie!"

"Oh, dinna speak! He has broken His word. I gave up all for it—all! I thought first I was to serve Him my own way, a single lass. But, Isabel, you mind? I wouldna maintain my way in the face of His word. I gave up all! And he wiled me out to the world with false hopes. And He's broken His own word. He's done nought—nought—nought, that He said!"

"Are ye speaking of Mr. John?" said Isabel, driven to her wits' end. "Oh, Ailie, is it him you mean?"

"I mean the Lord," said Ailie, folding her hands together, and pressing them to her breast.

And then there was a pause. Isabel, to whom this sounded like blasphemy, drew a step or two apart, full of agitation and alarm. But Ailie was not excited. She did not even change her attitude, but sat still with her eyes vaguely fixed on the world without, and the Loch which lay so bright in the sunshine. She gazed but she saw nothing—her mind's eye was turned inward; and to the young creature full of life, and all its movements, who stood by her, this abstracted woman was a marvel past all comprehension. Was she unhappy in her home? was it in the want of love that had frozen her? was it grief or loss, or some bereavement of which Isabel knew nothing? She broke the silence at last with timid inquiries, which sounded like a prayer.

"But, Ailie," she asked, faltering at every
"you have had no grief—in your life? You hav
—your husband? There has been no—death—
trouble? You've been—happy?—as much as fo
in this world?"

"Happy!" It did not sound like an answe
only like an echo of the other voice, and another
followed. "It was God's will I sought and n
else," she said at last. "Was it me to think of
ing or giving in marriage? It was my meat a
drink to do His will. Oh, Isabel Diarmid! it'
man and your bairn you think of—but no me.
I was thinking on was a world lying in darkne
bonnie and bright outside,—like *that*,—and a'
able and perishing within,—and He promise
would mend it a'. Go forth and preach, He s
and I'll come again and the holy angels, and br
a new heaven and a new earth. And there w
word in my ain mouth for a testimony. What
that I should speak in power if it hadna been
that did it?—and now all my hope is gone. The
Himself has broken His word. What do I care
earth should tumble to pieces this moment!
minister is but dead, Isabel, and you'll find
heaven; but I'm disappointed in my God," cried
suddenly hiding her face in her hands; "and Hi
never find again, neither in heaven nor earth."

This tragical outcry was so bitter and f
anguish, that Isabel stopped short in the protest
that rose to her lips. And yet the very thou
thus reproaching God made her tremble, as if it
bring down fire from heaven. "Oh, Ailie," she fa

"it is not for me to teach you; but oh, I dare not stand and hear you judging God!"

A low moan came from Ailie's breast. She shook her head sadly. Her great eyes turned to Isabel's for a moment with the anguish of a dumb creature in pain. She was far beyond tears. "There's nae power nor voice in me now," she said, "to teach or to speak. He's taken His gifts away, as well as the hope. I canna burst out and cry, 'Oh, why tarry the wheels of His chariot?' It's all gone—all gone! spirit, and power, and life, and hope!"

Isabel was too much bewildered and overwhelmed to reply. She, who had come here hoping for those confidences of the human life which are wont to pass between two young women with husbands and children, and with their first experience of the great events of life still fresh upon them—to be met by this spiritual despair and agony!—She had wanted to know how Ailie's reluctant heart had settled into the common bonds of life,—whether she had grown to be "happy" with her husband,—whether she had been comforted with children. She had wanted to tell her own story, her pre-eminent woe which marked her out among women,—her baby consolation. These human thoughts had been so strong in her, that she had almost forgotten even Ailie's prophetic character, yielding to the natural conviction that husband and children must draw down the most soaring spirit to a certain sweet bondage to the things of earth. "Oh, Ailie, have you no child?" she cried, at last finding no other words that would come.

She had but asked the question, when the door opened, and Mr. John came suddenly in. The house

was strangely noiseless and quiet, with no sounds of movement or human life in it, and his entrance was like an entrance on the stage, not as if he had come naturally from another place. He had a travelling bag slung across his shoulder, and a cloak on his arm, and his hands were full of letters, which the post-woman had just brought him. When he saw Isabel he paused, and the same softened look which had come over his face in the steamer at the sight of her again gleamed over it.

"You have come to see her?" he said, and looked from the young widow in her deep mourning to his marble-white wife in her snowy cold dress with the strangest look of comparison. It seemed to the man as if the fate that might have been his and that which was really his, thus stood together in visible contact. Isabel had grown more and more like her sister without knowing it. And now when her heart was so touched with sorrow, and wonder, and compassion, and all the depths of her nature moving in her eyes, it might have been Margaret herself who stood there, looking with infinite pity, striving vainly to understand the woman who was John Diarmid's wife.

"She is changed," he said, following with his eyes Isabel's anxious look,—"sadly changed. It is because she will look at things only in one way. We were mistaken, I think. The world itself is changed, though so few can see it. It is not by converting a single soul here and there, but by moving nations that God's work is to be done. Ailie, I am going away."

"Going: where to?" she said, with a momentary glance into his face; "to take the sword like them that shall *perish by the sword*? That's no His command.

I'm a poor creature,—a miserable creature—He's cast me off, and broken His word to me; but I'll no forsake Him. No; there's no word of power put into my mouth to speak to you, John Diarmid, not any word of power, but them that take the sword shall perish by the sword. He said it with His own lips."

"Amen!" said Mr. John; "it matters little. What is life to you or me that I should care to preserve it? As long as there is a race oppressed, so long is God's word hindered in this world. I must go to my work —the time of patience and quiet is past."

"Oh, Mr. John!" cried Isabel, "you will never go and leave her alone like this?"

He turned to her with once more that softened look. "Perhaps I would not," he said, "if I could do her good. But no, Isabel. We have wrenched ourselves out of the common soil, she and I, and we cannot take root again. I must go to do what's left me to do. We were fools, and took God at His word, without thinking that the paths must be made straight and the rough places smooth. I must go and work as I can—and she—will die."

He said this so low that Isabel hoped she alone heard it; and she could not restrain a cry of wonder, and horror, and protestation.

"Ay!" said Ailie from her window, "I will die, if I can. Oh, how easy it will be now, and sweet! When I think how I vexed Margret—And now she's in the secret, and knows all; and I'm fighting with my own heart, and cast off by my God. John Diarmid, maybe I'll be gone before you come back."

"I would not hinder you, Ailie!" he said, going up to her with sudden emotion and taking her listless

hite hands into his. "No, though you will repr
e before God, I would not keep you back,—
hen things have come so far, that is best."

"Yes," she said, "it's best. All's gone from n
ll's gone! I'm of no use but to die. They say v
he seed dies in the ground——Oh, John Diarmic
you'll grant it was a lying spirit, and no a word
he Lord, I think I could die content."

He did not make any answer, but stood before
holding her hands, gazing down with a certain ang
upon the white face from which all the tints of
had altogether died away.

"Here's Isabel," she went on, now for the first
rousing from her blank contemplation of the w
around, and fixing her eyes on his face, "*her* si
It is as if it were Margret come herself, out of hea
out of her grave, to hear you. John Diarmid, it
never love for me, I know. Will you tell me a
before *her;* was it the word of the Lord you bro
me yon night, and no just the madness in
heart?"

Still he made her no answer, but stood and
her shadowy hand and gazed down into her face.

"He said I was to wed him, Isabel, for it was
word of the Lord," cried Ailie, rising into exciten
'If he'll answer me this I want no more on earth.
t was but his madness, and no the word of the S
hen I could lie down at my Lord's feet and say w
inned. Oh, can you no see the difference? Say w
inned, it's easy, easy! But say thou hast tempted
nd made me fall; it's bitterer than death."

Isabel, with the tears streaming down her ch
rew near at this passionate appeal. She did not

derstand what it meant, nor what she was called upon to do. But her mediation was asked for, and she answered the call by instinct. She laid her hand upon Mr. John's arm and looked up with beseeching eyes in his face. "Oh, if you can ease her mind!" cried Isabel, not knowing what she asked.

"Would you have me say I had spoken a lie in the Lord's name?" he cried, and let his wife's hands fall, turning away from them with the old fiery glow blazing up in his eyes.

Then at once, and as by a spell, Ailie fell into the stillness and apathy from which she had been momentarily roused. Her husband turned away and went to another window to read his letters, leaving her relapsed into her old attitude, her hands again crossed in her lap, her eyes gazing out upon the bright, unvarying landscape. Isabel stood by her almost as motionless as she, looking at her with an anxiety which seemed to deprive her of all power of speech. What could she say? What was there in heaven or earth that could comfort this forlorn creature? How hopeless she looked, abstracted from all the life that surrounded her! Mr. John returned to them before Isabel could find a word to say. He went forward to his wife and kissed her lightly on the forehead.

"Farewell, Ailie," he said; "if I should, as you say, perish by the sword, this will be the end of all between us—and, perhaps, it would be best for you."

"Farewell," she said, dreamily; "farewell!" It seemed at first as if she was about to let him go without even a look. But at last a little stir of life moved her. "We've been no blessing to each other," she said; "neither you to me, nor I to you. And my

eart's dead and the Spirit gone from me; but ere never an ill man to me, John Diarmid. It's r abel should know. The will o' the Lord—if it he will o' the Lord—hasna been blessed to you o us. But you were never ill to me; you would l een good to me if——"

"If——" said Mr. John. "We will enter into ubject no more. But farewell, Ailie. I think we ever meet in this world again." Then he turne abel and took both her hands into his. "I do are for my life," he said, "no more than she does for God's service to do what He likes with. Bu ng as she lives will you be good to her? Nei or her sake, nor mine, but for——"

"O, hush!" cried Isabel, "there should be no c ame spoken of here. Why should you go av Ailie, you are his wife, tell him to stay. And you ot old that you should part. Oh, Mr. John, loo me! Is it well to be alone in the world at my nd at her age? Stay and take care of her you She is your wife. Ailie, take his hand and make tay!"

She stood impetuous between the two, holdi and of each, trying, with her young energy, to c the sombre, passionate, disappointed man and the tracted, visionary wife to each other.

"God will not bless you if you part," cried Is 'Oh, look at me that am a widow! What wou ive to have my good man to be my help and pr on? Ailie, speak to him, and he will stay."

Mr. John was the first to free himself from and.

"I cannot stay," he said, "not even if she wa

me as much as now she wants to be free of me. I have my use in the world, though not the use I once thought. Farewell! the chances are I will never see Loch Diarmid again."

"Is he gone?" cried Isabel. "Oh, Ailie, look out after him, or kiss your hand to him. Oh, give him one look before he goes, as if you were a living woman, and no made of stone!"

And in her horror she rushed herself into the recess of the window, and waved her hand to him as he went away. Mr. John turned round before the door of his father's house, which he was leaving, as he believed, for ever. A strange smile came over his face. The woman whom in his madness he had compelled to marry him, was there like a white vision, making no sign. But the other tearful face, full of emotion, was turned towards him; and Isabel, who had almost hated him for half her life, waved her hand in the compunction of her mind. "My Margaret!" he said, softly to himself; and thus turned and disappeared out of the quiet world in which he was unfit to live.

"He is gone! Oh, Ailie, he is gone!" said Isabel, coming back from the window with a sob.

"Ay, he's gone!" said Ailie; "and you are more moved than his wife. I know what you would say, Isabel, but it's useless—useless! What is man to me? All that I ever was, all that I wanted, was to be the handmaid of the Lord."

"But you are married to *him!*" cried Isabel; "you are his wife; you should go with him, or he should stay with you. Oh, Ailie, if it is not too late——!"

"There's nae marrying, nor giving in marriage in heaven," said Ailie. "If there is a heaven—if it's no

ust a delusion like the rest. But what can I do? villing to come to an end, and be done with all ı ter of life, if that's the Lord's will. Asking and p ng and wishing for one thing more than another, one clean out of my heart."

"And you have not a thought for him, the mo e has said farewell to you—not a tear. Oh, Ai ried Isabel, in her impetuosity, "are you mad tone?"

"My heart's dead," she said; and then rela nto silence, which the hasty, eager creature beside ould not break.

To leave her thus in her apathy seemed impos e Isabel, and it was equally impossible to stay evote herself to Ailie's solace, for Ailie did not s sceptible of any solace. She was lost in her houghts. Before Isabel's heart had ceased to t with agitation and excitement, Ailie had settled l nto the profoundest stillness, saying nothing to visitor, taking no notice even of her presence. there was nothing left for it but to leave her to he —to the silence she preferred.

Isabel had just made up her mind to do this, w the door opened again, this time with more sound commotion, and Ailie's mother entered the room. ame forward briskly, bringing the ordinary ou door life into the mysterious atmosphere, though a ain appearance of anxiety about her eyes betr hat even Janet was disturbed by a state of affai uch different from her hopes.

"Eh, Mrs. Lothian, I'm glad to see you," she s but will you no sit down? My daughter is so t p about parting with Ardnamore that she's n

thoughtful as she should be. Ailie, my dear, I hope you've thanked Mrs. Lothian for coming to see you. It's a real attention, and her no in the way of visiting; but you were aye friends. Will you no sit down?"

"I am going away," said Isabel, with a little dignity. "I have been here a long time. If there is anything I can do for Ailie, or anything Miss Catherine can do, if you will let us know——"

"Miss Catherine, no doubt, will come and see her," said Janet; "she's her ain relation. Na, there's nothing anybody can do. She's in her ain house, and a pleasant house it is. But Mrs. Diarmid will aye be glad to see her friends. You see she's taken up just at this moment with her husband going away," said the dauntless old woman, confronting Isabel bravely, with a look which defied criticism. Isabel, however, had been too much moved by the interview to have any regard for appearances. She turned round upon the watchful mother as soon as the door of the room closed upon them.

"Oh, tell me," she said, "has she been long like this? Is she always like this? Is there nothing that can be done?"

"Like what, Mistress Lothian?" said the old woman, looking direct into Isabel's eyes.

And then there was a dead pause. Janet's forehead had a contraction in it which only anxiety could have made so distinctly visible among the native wrinkles. The ruddy old cheek was blanched out of its usual wholesome wintry colour; but she stood by the door of the room in which her daughter sat, like a sentinel, and defied the world.

"I mean—oh, how can you ask me?—who ca
er, and not feel their hearts break?" cried Is
Will it always be like this?"

"I dinna take your meaning," said Janet, gri
'Ardnamore's away on business, and Mrs. Diarmi
maybe, no so cheerful as she might be. And I wou
my but she's a wee tired with her journey. I t
ye never were abroad? It's more fashious than
going to London. And when ye've been trave
like that, day and night ye want rest."

Isabel's innocent mind was confused by this
of the matter. "Then, do you think, after all,
she's not unhappy?" she asked.

"Unhappy!" cried the old woman, "and her a
man, and a comfortable house, and well though
and everything that heart could desire!"

She had raised her voice, and the words seem
ring through the mysterious, silent house. Isabel,
was too inexperienced to avoid yielding a bewil
assent to any strenuous assertion, was so move
this that she went away wondering, asking h
whether she could be mistaken. But as soon a
door had closed upon her poor Janet's strength
down. She threw her apron over her head, and le
against the wall, silent yet convulsed by a mome
struggle. "But I'll never let on to the world," th
woman said to herself, as she came out from
that veil with a fiery sparkle in her worn, old
Poor Ailie had at least one defender ready to
by her to the death.

CHAPTER XIV.

ISABEL went out again on her way home with a mingled feeling of relief and bewilderment. She had seen sorrow in many of its phases, and had acquired some experience of the ordinary perplexities of life. But unhappiness and disappointment she did not know. The sight of them, the very thought of them, was novel to her. Those strange jars which are in life, which turn its sweetness into gall, and change the current of all ordinary human emotions, were unknown to her. Her own marriage had not been a love-match; but yet she had settled down into affectionate dependence upon her husband and brightened to passionate love for her child. It did not seem possible to her that a woman could be a man's wife and yet be absorbed in other things, like Ailie, or that a man should regard the companion of his existence as Mr. John did. It was a curious cross light streaming over the common path. She had been startled by Janet's affirmation of fatigue; but as soon as she was alone her good sense came to her aid, and brought back before her the true state of affairs. The two were bound together by a link painful and irksome to both. The purpose for which they submitted to it had failed; and now they were mutually straining at the chain. How strange it was! Why could not they content themselves with the inevitable —why could not they make the best of it? Ailie might not be a prophetess any longer; but she might be a good Christian, and mistress of her house, which Isabel within herself felt would be the better part. And why could not Mr. John settle down and be kind to his

ife and do his ordinary duties? God could su
ke care of the world without them. Why would
ey content themselves and return to the com
urse of life? This Isabel asked herself with the
nscious arbitrariness of people who judge for otl
e saw their duty so clearly. It seemed so wonde
at they could not think sensibly and act wisely,
ceive all the advantages of this for themselves.

The road which led from Ardnamore gate to
rders of the Loch was steep and narrow and encl
high banks. It was, indeed, one of the little g
ich furrow these hillsides in all directions. A l
n by the edge of the way, and it was full of ab
rns and corners, which seemed to cut short the p
d hid what was coming. Isabel went along mus
r face and her mind full of thought, so much o
ed with this new problem, and how it was that pe
uld elude or mistake their plainest duties, that
n affairs had quite gone out of her mind. For
oment she was once more disturbed and fancy-
aling somehow her own still life, and the one s
sorbing natural duty left to her, to be doubly s
comparison with the unnatural torpor and excite
which Ailie's existence had lost itself; and asl
self whether she could not do something to win
happy prophetess back to the common level, an
me hope of happiness, or at least peace. She
t nourishing one single thought of herself or
n affairs as she threaded the winding way; and
ps it was for this reason that the sight of the fig
lvancing to meet her as she turned the corner, c
on her with such startling suddenness. Two s
ought her from the solitude of the road immedia

in front of him, and these two steps marked the immensely greater revulsion from unselfish solicitude for another to the sudden wild return of her own life into her passive soul, which seemed no actor, but only a spectator of the change. She came round the corner lightly and swiftly with dreaming eyes, looking into the air, which was vacant of everything but the trees and the reflexions of sky and water, and all the sweetness of the time:—and suddenly looked full into the face of Horace Stapylton, so near to her that he seemed to have sprung from some hiding-place, or dropped from the sky! Had there been even a minute's interval to prepare her for his appearance, it would have been different. But he came upon her all at once without even a sound of his step on the mossy, grassy path. She stood still and gave a low cry. Her heart gave a leap as to her lips. A sudden colour rushed over her face, and with a pang as sudden, the sense of having betrayed herself rushed after the first thrill of emotion into her heart.

"Isabel!" he said, making one rapid step towards her, and taking her hand in his. He would never have ventured to do it, but for her self-betrayal. He had not been taken by surprise. He gazed at her with eyes that shone and glowed with unconcealed feeling. Isabel grew as suddenly pale as she felt the warm pressure of his hand. She drew herself away, and stepped aside, and made him a little formal bow.

"I beg your pardon," she said, "Mr. Stapylton; I did not know you were there. It was—the surprise——"

"And then when you recollect, and get over the surprise, you drive me away," he said, looking as he

had looked in the old days, when he had a lover's right to her attention, and dared complain and quarrel with her. "Why should you drive me away? Why may we not be friends?"

"Mr. Stapylton, you mistake," she said, with confusion; "I was not thinking—there is no reason. I was startled to see you—I mean, to see any one. The road is so lonely here."

And then they turned mutually, and looked at each other, feeling a change which neither could account for. It might be that he was the more respectful as being less sure of her than he had been before. But his tone was softened, his very intonation was different, Isabel felt, as she glanced at him slyly from under her drooping eyelids; she could not think it was the same man who had once treated her with the half-contempt of a superior, even amid all the softness of a lover. Why should she think of such things at all? What was he to her more than any other stranger? What power was it that took away all her composure, and made her heart beat, and her cheek flush, and her lip falter, in spite of herself? She could have beaten herself, as she stood there arrested against her will, her eyes shrinking before his, notwithstanding all she could do to keep calm. As for Stapylton's feelings, they were full of wonder too. She was the same Isabel, and yet not the same. Her very movements, the pose of her slight figure, though identical, were yet different. Her shy, youthful grace had grown into a still shy, most youthful matron dignity. The two recognised instinctively, as they stood confronting each other, that a change had passed upon each; and the change, howsoever produced, and wheresoever tending, was so far of an ele-

vating tendency. Admiration more ardent than he had ever felt for her before sprang up in Stapylton's mind; and in Isabel's there breathed a certain sigh of satisfaction. "He was more worthy than I thought him," she said to herself, looking shyly at the face which bore traces of refining passion. He had deserved the thoughts she had once lavished on him. She believed she would be satisfied never to see him more—but yet for that once she was glad.

"There was a time," he said, turning with her as she made a movement to go on,—"there was a time when it would have been no surprise to you to meet me anywhere, wherever I knew you to be."

"But times change," she said, breathlessly, and then, with eagerness to change the subject, made the best plunge she could into general conversation. "I have been seeing Mrs. Diarmid, at Ardnamore."

"That was Ailie; was it not?"

"Yes, it was Ailie," she said, regaining a little courage. "She married Mr. John. Not caring for him, perhaps—that is—I mean—not at first."

"People do such things," he said, not looking at her, "every day."

"And she has come back," said Isabel, who was too much agitated to think that he meant to launch any passing arrow at herself, "and I do not understand what ails her. She is no longer a prophet; but that is not all. She sits and never looks at you, never speaks; and she says God has deceived her; and her husband has gone away."

"They must be a strange couple," said Stapylton, bringing that subject to a sudden close. Perhaps it was her evident agitation, the tremor with which she

cognised him in her surprise, that made him so l
ut he was impatient, it was clear, of ordinary cor
ation. "I can't call you by your new name," he
ddenly. "When I saw you the other day, with
ld woman by your side—and that—child—in
rms——"

"Mr. Stapylton, you are not to speak to me so

"When I saw you," he repeated, with a cer
urry and sweep of passion, which she could not s
gainst, "it shook me like an earthquake. Yes, I
– I have been like you, trying not to think. I
y now to make me believe you are quite calm
g of other things. You can't forget three years
–I know you don't forget——"

"I have nothing to be ashamed of—in—three y
go," said Isabel, trembling, and with all the co
shing to her face.

"And I have," he said. "Ah, I acknowledge t
would confess it on my knees if you would li
shamed,—bitterly ashamed! To think of all
ight have been prevented,—all the harm that m
ave been spared—if I had not been such a co
nd a fool."

For the moment he seemed to forget even her.
yes were fixed on the ground, and he gave a s
ering sigh that was almost a groan. The anx
pectator, looking on, felt, with a woman's unconsc
lf-satisfaction, that he looked back with remors
llies or sin which his loss of her had led him
here was self-reproach in his voice; and Isabel f
nder compunction seize her, felt her strength st
om her. If going away from her had made him
rate, should not she be the first to forgive?

"Indeed I do not blame you," she said softly; "it has turned out—for the best."

"For the best!" he cried passionately; "at least, you cannot expect me to grant that. Your very dress which you wear for *him*—your very name—everything—How can I stand here and look at you and bear it—I who have never changed in my heart?"

"Mr. Stapylton," said Isabel, "you have nothing to do with me now. You are a stranger, and we were not speaking of your heart. That has nothing—nothing to do with me. I must go home to my baby. I beg of you not to come any further, but to let me go."

"Isabel," he said, "look at me, don't turn your eyes away from me: I am not a stranger; you could not make me so were you ever so cruel; the time will never be when we shall have nothing to do with each other, you and I—only look at me! What reason can there be why we should part now?"

"Oh, Mr. Stapylton, let me go," she said, shrinking aside from him, not venturing to raise her eyes. She dared not look at him as he begged her to do. She knew that her eyes would have betrayed her—that the beating in her temples and the throbbing in her ears would have found some expression in every look she could turn upon him. Never for all these years had her heart beat as it was beating now. She had been a wife and a widow and a mother, and yet the sound of Horace Stapylton's voice moved her more deeply than all the events of her own life had done. She hated herself for it, but yet it was so. Her heart went out to him past all her power of restraint. And though her face flushed with bitter shame, and her heart ached with self-reproach, yet she could not help it. The only

safeguard she had was in flight. "Let me go," she repeated, keeping her eyes on the ground, and keeping as far apart from him as the narrow path would permit.

"Yes, if you hate me altogether," he said, with vehemence. "If you do, I might have spared myself —much, very much, that can't be undone. If you hate me, I will let you go!"

The sound of his voice went to her heart. She was free to pass, yet she could not refrain from one glance at him. He was trembling; his face was as pale as death, and drawn together with tragic force of passion. And Isabel could not bear this dreadful expression on the face of the man she had once loved.

"Oh, it is not that I hate you!" she cried, out of the depths of her heart.

"Then you love me!" he said, wildly seizing her hand. "Between us there can be no alternative. Oh, Isabel, I have bought you dear! Never send me away again."

"Oh, let me go!" she repeated, with such a struggle going on within as her whole past life had not experienced. She, Mr. Lothian's wife, to stand here with a man—any man, be he whom he might, kissing her hand! She, little Margaret's mother! She could not bear it. She snatched her hand from him, and covered her face with it, and sank down on the grassy bank where she stood. What else could she do but weep her heart out, words being impossible? She could say no more; she could not dare to look at him again. The struggle had come to such a point that there was nothing left for her but the unspeakable utterance of tears.

And she was grateful to him that he took no advantage of her weakness. He did not even take her hand again, or take her into his arms as he might have done, but stood looking at her, with something she did not understand in his eyes. How it was she saw the look in his face, through her passionate tears, she herself could not have explained. But she was conscious of it, and of a certain compassion and awe mingled in the eagerness of his gaze, which kept him standing apart, with a delicacy which had never appeared in him before.

"Isabel," he said, hoarsely; "though you are cruel to me, I will not be hard upon you. I love you the same as ever—and you love me; all that has come between us is past. Don't let us so much as speak of that—it is all over, my darling; there is no obstacle between us now. No, I will not press you further. I would not vex you for all the world. I will come to you to the old place or to your own house, my dear, if that is better. And after all it has cost us, Isabel—oh, Isabel! may we not be happy at last?"

"Horace, let me be!" she cried, rising to her feet and holding out her hands to him as with an appeal for mercy.

"I can never let you be," he cried, seizing her hands and putting down his face upon them for one moment. She felt that his eyes were wet and his lips dry and quivering, and their positions seemed reversed all at once—and it was she who yearned over him, longing to console him and give some comfort to his heart.

"Oh, Horace," she said, "you are going away,—you said you were going away? and you'll forget. I

ould not live if I thought it grieved you and r
our heart sore. You'll go away, and you'll thinl
ıe no more! Why should we be so sorry? It ha:
een appointed that you and me should be toge
id me farewell; and, oh, go away and mind m
ıore. But I'll think of you every night when I
ıy prayers."

His answer was such a groan as made her
nd shrink; and then he raised a pale, passionate
› her, and drew her to him holding both her han

"You are to be my wife, Isabel!" he said.

"No: oh, no. I am *his* wife," she said, with a
alf of terror; "and my child,—my child!"

"Was it my fault he took you from me?" he c
I was absent and did not know. Your child sha
ine, Isabel; and you are mine—say you are n
Ve can never more part again."

"Oh, Horace! let me go."

It was the sound of a step on the road w
ıterrupted this strange struggle. He let her h
ll as this sound, and that of a cheerful rural ı
inging some homely ditty, fell suddenly into t
xclamations of passion, and stopped them as l
ell. When Helen, the "lass" from Ardnan
ıme down the road she saw, at first without surp
rs. Lothian walking down before her, with a "str
ntleman" by her side—"ane of thae English," H
id to herself, reflecting that the young widow
een in London, and consequently might be supp
› be acquainted with that nation in general. He
ter reflections, when she came to put this and
gether, were of a different character, but for
ıoment she was not suspicious. She passed them

the ordinary salutation, "It's a fine day," taking no note of the tearful dilation of Isabel's eyes; and, all unconsciously to herself, was Isabel's guardian and protector. It was like the Stapylton of old that he should have fallen into a moody silence after this interruption. And he left Isabel when they reached the highroad. "I will see you again," was all he said. To see them thus parting, taking different directions, no one would have thought what a contest of wills had just taken place between them, nor with what an agitated soul Isabel turned along the sunny way by the Loch side, to the home which had once been so still and quiet, where her baby awaited her, and her tranquil, pensive, unexciting life remained waiting to be taken up again as soon as she should return.

Could she take it up again? Could she drive from her ears the sound of the words she had just heard, and silence the throbbing of the heart into which they had fallen? Could she be again as if this past day, this hour, had never been? She was so exhausted by the violence of her own emotions, that she was scarcely capable of asking herself these questions as she went quickly, feebly, almost tottering at first, along the long, smooth line of road. Who can annihilate any hour of his life, and make it as though it had not been? And of all hours, this hour, the most passionate, the most startling that had ever come to her? Isabel hurried along, her limbs bending under her, her veil covering her agitated face. She could not go through the village in the tumult of her thoughts. She went up past the house which had been her own, the Manse to which she had gone a bride, and been brought away a widow. Except when she went to church she had

before approached the Manse since the moment she left it. Now she gazed at it, trying to make ; feel the associations of the place—trying to her life there, the bitterness of her sorrow— to realize the pang she ought to have felt at ght of other dwellers about, and the new minister ng at the familiar gate where her good husband o often stood. She tried with all her simple to bring back into her mind all those regrets, ven bitternesses, which Mr. Lothian's widow have felt. She tried so hard that she suc- l in bringing the tears into her eyes. But all ne her heart was beating with guilty agitation— lt more painful, more poignant, more delicious, ny emotion of her past life. Poor Isabel doubled il over her face, and stole across the braes s the Glebe with a stealthy, guilty feeling, as had been an impostor discovered. Oh, to think s that good man's wife! to think she was little ret's mother! and yet have a heart capable of robbing, and aching, and dancing in her breast, words of any man! She went home like a ghost the sunny, heathery braes; and the Dominie, w her from his door, felt his heart bleed for hinking how hard it must have been for her to hat way, and wondering why she exposed her- such an unnecessary trial. Poor young thing! alone, with her head bent, and her crape veil ng her tears, from the home where she had been vorshipped than a queen, to the melancholy little e of her childhood! Tears came into the Do- s great cavernous eyes, moistening the thick eye- as he watched her lessening figure on the hill-

side path. Why had she exposed herself to such a trial? And if he could have seen into Isabel's heart, and looked amazed upon all the trouble there, it would still have been next to impossible to a soul so inexperienced in those strange sophistries of nature, to have understood the reason why.

CHAPTER XV.

JEAN was looking out in the opposite direction, somewhat anxious for her stepdaughter's return. She was standing at the cottage-door with Baby Margaret in her arms, straining her eyes along the vacant road, and full of anxiety. She gave a suppressed scream when Isabel came noiselessly up behind her, and, without saying a word, clutched at the child and took it out of her arm.

"God bless us, I thought it was a ghost!" she cried. "Oh, Isabel, you're like death. It's been more than you can bear."

"I am tired," said Isabel, holding her child close with a vehemence which terrified the little creature; and as she looked at her stepmother, the pallor gave way to a sudden, overpowering flush. Her eyes fell before the good woman's anxious, searching look. She turned away, still holding her child strained to her heart. She could not trust herself to meet Jean's eyes, or even her baby's. Could she ever venture to look any one in the face again?

"It's a long walk," said Jean, anxiously, following her in, "and you've come the long way round by the braes; and it's been too much for you. Oh, Isabel,

my bonnie woman! it's brought everything bε your mind."

"It did not need the sight of Ailie to do said Isabel, scarcely knowing what she said. things ever go out of one's mind?"

And she held her child closer than ever, aı her face in Margaret's frock. It did not occur that she was betraying herself even by the pass strain of that embrace. Jean gazed at her alε noting every change in her face, the sudden flus pallor, the inward-looking eyes, the reluctance tc her own affectionate, anxious gaze.

"Was she awfu' changed?" she asked.

"Changed—whom?" said Isabel, with a little She had scarcely uttered the words when she lected herself. Ailie had been driven entirely her mind by the after event; the scene whicl made so deep an impression on her before sh Stapylton was half effaced from her very recoll It rose upon her dimly as she tried to reme "Oh, yes, very much changed," she said, and st short, unable to revive her own interest in a mat faint and far away.

"Do you think she's happy?" asked Jean.

Strange to think any one could be so inqui Why should she be forced to pause and recall ε perience so distant? "I don't know," said I "how can anybody tell? People are happy som when they ought not to be happy, and miserable they have no reason to be miserable. Am judge?—or how can I tell?"

"But dear me, Isabel, you were awfu' aı about her," cried Jean, affronted; "and would

nobody any peace till ye had been to see her. And now it seems ye dinna care."

"Oh, yes, I care; if you would let me rest and be quiet, and not ask me anything now!"

Half offended, wondering, and disturbed, Jean looked at the speaker. It was very clear that Ailie had but little to do with Isabel's excitement. This sudden irritation and impatience reminded her of the old times before her stepdaughter had been subdued by the events of life, or had learned to control herself. Mrs. Lothian had not been guilty of those movements of temper and impetuous feeling which were so lively in Isabel Diarmid. Was it that some other subtle change had come, setting at nought the work of experience, and bringing back the original natural condition of the girl's restless, vivacious soul? Jean did not ask herself so elaborate a question, but the substance of it was in her mind. She said no more, but went softly about the room, putting in order things which needed no arrangement, and watching secretly her stepdaughter's looks. Isabel took no notice of what she was doing. As soon as she was left to herself she relieved Baby Margaret from the close strain against her breast which had terrified the child, and began to kiss her passionately and pour forth over her inarticulate murmurs of tenderness. Such an outburst of compunctious caresses was as significant as the other strange appearances in her. "As if she had done the innocent bairn some harm," Jean said to herself. And what could it mean? Isabel would let no hand but her own touch her child during the remainder of the day. She made no further comment upon her visit to Ardnamore, but occupied herself wholly with little

ret, talking to her, caressing her, controlling her will—having even, for the first time in her life, a struggle and contest with the child, who perfelt by instinct the state of excitement in which ther was. Jean looked on without interfering, curious, grave scrutiny and alarm. When the was naughty, and cried, and struggled, she kept l not to put herself in the way. But many ations were in her mind, and some of them not m the truth. Isabel's whole being was jarred t of tune. All the old restlessness of her youth ome back to her. The soft resignation of her d life, the ineffable content of her motherhood, iven way before the sudden flood of old recollecand old love. Stapylton's eyes seemed to be on she sat there silent, trying to occupy herself er child. His words were sounding in her ears. ad learned, she thought, to estimate him at his value, and had severed her heart so completely im that the very remembrance of him had faded her. And now, at the first word he spoke, at st glance, what was this flood of ancient folly shed back upon her?

e had had no reason to change her opinion; for ng she could tell, he was the same man from her heart had revolted, who had slighted her, ven in his love treated her with but a cavalier ss. He had never taken any steps to claim her e when she was free. He had left her to Mr. n without a word. He had shown no sympathy r sorrow, no tenderness for herself. He had tried suade her to go away with him, but not in the rable, straightforward way which alone would

have been worthy of her. She tried to think over everything that told against him, that was most likely to nerve her against his influence; but it was all in vain. Her heart went out to him in spite of herself. It was gone with a leap out of her own keeping to the man who said he still loved her—and whom she loved. Yes! this is how it was; notwithstanding the long quiescence, and silence, and direction to other quarters of her affections, she loved him still. She could not mistake it now. She did not approve of him, nor feel that she was anything but wrong and foolish. She had no trust in him, nor certainty of what manner of man he was. But she loved him. She struggled sorely with herself, representing to her own reason all the defects of his character, all that he had made her suffer, all that might yet be expected from him. And she found that those thoughts carried no weight. They flew across the surface of her being, like a flight of birds. She tried to think of her husband, and carry back her mind at least, if not her heart, to him—and could not. She tried with double ceremonials of worship, with closest tendance and service, to persuade herself that her child still held the first place, and was the centre of her world; and with her idol in her very arms felt her thoughts and her heart go away to this man who was nothing to her. Nothing to her! She repeated the words endeavouring to impress them on her own mind. He was nothing to her! Once he might have been all, but he had not chosen it. And now what was he—what could he be? The evening went on, and Isabel scarcely knew how it went. She did not hear when Jean spoke to her. Her face had the absorbed, ab-

stracted look of a dreaming creature. By times she would start with a guilty humility, and endeavour to take up the thread of domestic concerns. But these returns showed only the more how far astray her mind had gone.

When little Margaret had gone to sleep, Isabel went, as she had done once before, to the drawer in which she kept her treasures, and took out from thence a letter—the same letter she had read so carefully at the last turning-point of her life. She went out, as she had done then,—it seemed to her, indeed, as if she were repeating step for step every movement she had made on that day, so short a time since, when in her sister's little hillside oratory she had gone to decide what she supposed would be the course of her life. She had done it all then, and had concluded it was over, and everything safely settled for her existence. Was it yesterday she had done it? Was it in a former life? Had she ever done it at all, or only dreamt it? With a curious fascination she repeated that past passage, putting her foot, she could have thought, on the same closed daisies, weighing down the elastic harebells for a moment as she passed, wondering, wondering within herself which time was real and which a vision. *Then* she had to decide whether she should accept a bulwark and support for her life, a true man's love and succour—or make choice of a dream instead. And now the strange wheels of time had turned, and he that was so sure and true had vanished from her like a shadow, and the chimera had risen again, and stood, looking real, before her dazzled, troubled eyes.

She *sat down on the* grassy seat where Margaret

had sat so often musing of heavenly things, and groped among all those shades that surrounded her. She asked herself—not distinctly in so many words, but vaguely in her trouble—Had Margaret ever been? had Mr. Lothian ever been? had she herself, still so young, with such warm blood in her veins, and tingling imaginations in her heart, formed a part of those lost existences? or was it all a dream? Her brain swam as she thought and pondered. It was not thinking—it was but a rush of unanswerable questions, longings, fancies, through her mind. She was but passive in the matter, though she was not aware of it. She took out Stapylton's letter, the last she had received from him—the letter which she had thrown indignantly from her when she read it in the light of Mr. Lothian's tender, reverential, adoring love. But now no such illumination was upon it; she had nothing to contrast it with, but only her own treacherous heart to fix upon the words of fondness that were in it, and to ignore all the rest. And the sound of his voice was still lingering in her ears, his eyes had been upon her, lighting up suddenly an unthought-of warmth in her life, revealing to her the hidden thing which had been there all the time, though she had not known it. She did not trust him—did not approve him; doubted, and feared, and trembled—yet loved this man, and could not help it; and had been loving him unawares all these years. The history of her heart seemed to come before her in similitudes without any will of hers. It had been, like the daisies, dormant, and hidden among the grass, till the sun called it forth. It had been, like a smouldering spark, waiting the first breath of air to wake it into flame. When she had thought

herself so calm, it was only that he was absent—that winter had benumbed her life. When she thought other loves had taken full possession of her, it was but because her heart was dormant, awaiting its resurrection. And now he had come, and the flower had burst forth in a moment; the lights were lit, the woman awoke at the naming of her name;—with no will of hers! Her heart, thus awakened, uttered nothing but a cry of painful, feeble resistance. It was necessity, fatality,—anything but choice. She sat aching, crying, trying to struggle. All the soft dignity of her young matronhood; all the love she had for her child; all her satisfaction in the goodwill and tenderness of her friends; the reverence that belonged to her husband—the rights of baby Margaret to a home and provision of her very own—would have to be thrown behind her, if she suffered her steps to be led into this new way. What was she to do? Oh, if God would but help her, sending a special message of indication, as so many believed He did when His servants asked! Oh, if Margaret could but help her here in this spot, where she had so often prayed!

She sat pale, with her hands clasped on her knees, and her heart moaning and crying in the stillness—What should she do? She could not fly and escape the temptation. Circumstances bound her here where no doubt it would be brought before her again and more strongly every day. And how could she resist it? She might refuse his prayer outwardly and keep apart from him, but her heart was gone from her—and that she could recall no more. She might resume the routine of her existence, but it would be a life with all the heart departed from it. At a word, at the sound

of his voice, at his very step on the path, her whole being had gone out to him. Oh, what was this strange love so bitter-sweet over which she had no control, which went from her, leaving her no power of restraint? Heaven gave no sign as she sat sighing, her heart aching, and her very frame in sympathy, on the silent hill-side. The burn tinkled, as it did indifferently summer and winter, whether it was the prayers of a saint or the struggles of a suffering woman to which it sounded its soft accompaniment. And even Margaret out of the shadowy land made no attempt to guide her sister. There was no one in heaven or earth to tell her what she must do. She had to decide for herself.

Then she would recommence the same weary round, going over and over everything:—his words of this day, well-remembered words of former times, her duties to her child and to the good man who was dead, whose name she bore, and who had cherished her so tenderly. Oh, if some one would but stand forward suddenly revealed out of the silence and tell, as by divine authority, what she should do! But no such blessed apparition came. She was left to fight it out by herself; the heavens did not open to relieve her; Margaret was singing her even-song at the foot of the celestial throne, and was no longer touched by a sense of her sister's necessities on earth; and neither her God, nor her husband, who was there too, rapt in that awful blank of blessedness, seemed to care any longer what should become of her, poor helpless youthful creature, all alone with such a decision to make. And her heart was a traitor, and had flown to him, her old love,—her one *love*,—the only man in the world to whom it belonged. The more she thought, as she called it—though in

ality the process going on within her was not tho
—the more bewildered she became, the more conf
nd dark grew all the world around her. It was
crisis like the last where a clear, straight-for
ath was set before her feet and all complications
bsent. Now every complication which could ad
he difficulty was here. And no one even knew
orely tried she was, no one attempted to help
The cry of her uneasy soul went up to Heaven a
nd Heaven was absorbed in some vast celebratio
raise or rapture of blessedness, and took no l
abel's tears fell unseen as the evening dews fell
he soft silent grass, which retained no trace of t
nd the soft darkling nature embraced her round
ound, sympathetic, yet unaiding, and gave no
ghtenment. Oh, how far off was that silent, shi
eaven! Oh, how voiceless, how unresponsive,
is dewy earth!

She got up at last, and went home, worn out,
artially stilled by her fatigue, and lay down by
aby's side, and closed her eyes and tried to sleep
orget. And she did sleep by snatches through
hort night, but did not forget. Even in her dr
e came to her like a spectre, and took her child
f her arms—and she woke with a cry, clasping
Margaret wildly, in fierce resistance; and slept a
nd saw herself wandering with him across the b
going further and further away from the cottag
which she knew her baby was, with a frightful, l
ess sense of power on his part, and inability on
o resist his will. The difference between her slee
houghts and her waking thoughts, was one w
Isabel did not mark much at the time. It was th

her sleep she was a victim, oppressed by him and injured; and awake it was not he but Love that was the tyrant, drawing her to him with a soft force against which she could not contend. Such a strange difference many a distressed and perplexed soul has felt before Isabel. It struck her afterwards, when Time had taken up the parable and made his pitiless explanation, not at the moment when such teaching as was in it might have been of some avail. And thus passed the day and night.

CHAPTER XVI.

JEAN had taken fright, though she could not herself have told why. For one thing, she was aware of Stapylton's presence in the parish, and thought of him as of a prowling enemy. But it was difficult for her to associate Isabel's strange abstractions, her passionate devotion to her child, her evening vigil in Margaret's ancient haunt, and all the signs of suppressed agitation about her, with the reappearance of her former lover. Jean had passed the period at which people realise vividly such conflicts of the heart. It seemed to her more likely that Isabel's calm had been disturbed by all the recollections which the sight of Ailie must have brought to her, than that Mr. Lothian's widow could have been agitated or excited by the appearance of any man under the sun. "Yon English lad" had never been good enough for "our Isabel" in her stepmother's eyes; and that she could think of him now seemed well-nigh impossible. But yet something was wrong; and as soon as Isabel had left the house, Jean sent her son on an errand across the braes to the Dominie to beg

his help and counsel. Jamie was too late to find "the Maister." He had gone out on one of the long walks with which, now summer had come, he endeavoured to make up to himself for the want of his friend and companion. But, notwithstanding the failure of this messenger, Mr. Galbraith heard the news more distinctly than Jean could have informed him, or than she herself knew. The smithy was still open when he returned home in the twilight, and had as usual a little band collected in it of men, observers upon humanity and critics of its wondrous ways. John Macwhirter himself, with his shirt-sleeves rolled up, was in front of the group, doing nothing, for it was warm, and it was near even his time for closing. He was rubbing his great hands together, looking meditatively into the summer air; but the observation that fell from his lips was not an original one. "Women are queer beings," was all that he said.

"I see nothing queer in it, for my part," said Peter Chalmers. "He was well known to be after Isabel afore ever she married the minister; and now he's come back——"

"Who are ye speaking of, I would like to know?" the Dominie said, who had entered listlessly, and whom these words had excited in spite of himself.

"There was nae offence meant," said Peter. "I ca' her but as a' the country-side ca'ed her afore she married the minister. And it was nae secret that ever I heard tell of. I've seen them thegither on the braes and on the road. It was kept quiet, I've aye heard, out of consideration for Margret, who couldna bide the lad. And syne when Margret died he was sent for hame—*and out o' sight* out o' mind is the way of the

world. But now that she's free, and he's come back, ye canna crush nature. If they come thegither again, as is to be expected, what's that to you or me?"

"Again, I ask, who are ye speaking of?" said Mr. Galbraith with grim emphasis.

"Na, na, maister, there's nae call to be angry," said John Macwhirter; "he's a nasty cynical body, but this time it's true. Naebody thought mair of the auld minister than me,—this one could never hold the candle to him; but he wasna just the man for a young lass. And she's but young for a' that's come and gane; and her lad's come back——"

"How dare ye say such a word?" cried the Dominie enraged. "Eh, men, you're no worthy to be called men, if a lassie like that made a widow as she was, gets no reverence from ye! Poor bit gentle thing! her only protector gone, and nothing but an infant between her and despair ye may say. I wonder ye don't think shame?"

"That's a' true, a' true," said the smith; "but I aye stick up for justice. If Mrs. Lothian should be glad to see the lad she once likit, is that ony sin? Naebody was blaming her. No, no, maister, ye mustna go beyond nature. He was a good man and a clever man; but ye're no so simple as to think that a bonnie young lass should be bound a' her life because she was his wife for a year! Would that be reasonable? I'm no taking one side or another, but as Peter says, 'What's the harm?'"

"I ask ye what's the evidence! which is more to the purpose?" said the Dominie.

"Weel, nae doubt it's a slender foundation to build so much on," said John. "She's been at Ardnamore

the day, and she met him on the road. That's all about it—nothing ye may say, but casting a seed into the ground. Eelin, the lass at Ardnamore, saw them talking, and she came on and tellt the wives; and the wives they've a' made up their minds how it's to be: —ye canna stop the tongues of a wheen women. And I canna say it's anything but natural if ye ask me mysel."

"It would be hard to tell in what you're better than the women, making a work about such childish clavers," said Mr. Galbraith with disdain.

"Well we're mair philosophical," said the smith; "they're a' at her like hens at a grosset, and no a civil word in their heads. I'm an awfu' man for justice myself. A young lass is but a young lass if she was a widow twenty times over, and nae doubt before he did such a foolish thing the minister counted the cost, and kent weel that his young widow would wed some other man. Lord bless us it's human nature! She's no five-and-twenty yet. She's no an auld wife to be content with her wean? It's nature, just nature! I'm neither blaming her nor him."

"I advise you to say no more about it, philosophical or no," said the Dominie; "there are lads and lasses enough in the parish without bringing in them that are out of your way. I say nothing for the rest —but, John Macwhirter, there are inklings of understanding about you, and I looked for better at your hand."

"I've said nae ill I ken of," said the smith, half sullen, half abashed. "A woman is but a woman if she was a queen. No but what I have a great respect for Mrs. Lothian," he added, with some embarrassment.

"Lord, Peter, if ye say another word, as sure as death ye shall hae a taste of the Loch, to put ye in mind wha ye are."

"I'm no conscious I ever forgot who I was," said Peter, with a laugh, "nor other folk. Respect be to a' where respect is due; but as ye were saying, John, lads and lasses are aye the same, be it in a cot or in a palace. The Maister himsel canna contradict that."

"I'm saying nothing about your lads and lasses," said the Dominie, severely; "but, lads, ye can have little feeling in your minds, and ye've forgotten every lesson ye ever got from me, if ye cannot respect the very name of a woman that never did one of ye harm —that has neither father, nor brother, nor husband, to stand up for her—and that is no more mistress who she shall meet on the common road, or who will speak to her, than you or me. There's no a man among you but should have been a lone lassie's defender and guard of honour had ye listened to me!"

With these words Mr. Galbraith started forth into the night, in all the grandeur of indignation, leaving the club of rural gossips much disconcerted. He had taught the most of them all they knew of book-learning, and there were few who had not a certain awe of the Maister who had corrected his youth. There was silence when he went out followed after an interval by a feeble attempt at a laugh. "The Dominie's mounted his high horse," somebody said in the darkness; but there was no immediate echo of the sentiment. And what the Dominie had commenced was accomplished triumphantly by Mrs. Macwhirter, the smith's wife, who came forward with her baby in her arms, to sound a note of victory over the discomfiture of "the men."

"Eh, but ye've weel deserved it!" she said, "cla
g and clavering like a wheen auld wives. Tha
ould say sae! There's no an auld wife in the coun
le that's a man's match for an ill tongue. A'
sty stories that are ever told in this parish,
ony a parish mair, trace them up, and ye'll
ld they've come frae the smiddy, or the pul
nerever there's men meeting. Eh, lads, I would th
ame——"

"Gang back to your weans!" said the smith,
ptorily. "It's late, friends, and time we were a
r beds. I'll wish ye good night, for it's time
ut up the place. Gang back, I say, woman, to y
ans."

Thus the meeting of the rural convocation
ought to a sudden close. The Dominie heard
und of the dispersing as he ascended the brae to
rn house, and was gratified to feel that his w
ill had weight. But, notwithstanding his indigna
ld claim of respect and reverence for Isabel, his n
as very ill at ease. It was all true, though it m
s coarsely stated. She was young and had no on
e world "between her and despair," as he had l
lf said, except the baby, who had rapt her
oundless content for the moment, but who could
r years be any companion to her mind or h
The Dominie, too, was a philosopher in his way.
ad learned to look on with the sober eyes of
erience at all the difficulties of human life; an
ad been a standing wonder to him how the yo
ul, full of energy and vitality, and all the nat
ngings and impulses of youth, should have b
ddenly lulled out of grief, out of thought, ou

every trouble by the advent of this child with whom there was no possibility of interchange of mind or feeling. It had been a wonder to him. He had stood and gazed at these strangest phenomena, and asked himself what extraordinary difference of nature could there be in a woman which made it possible? To think that an intellectual, reasoning, feeling creature, over whom the wildest storm of conceivable misfortune had suddenly swept, should be in a moment lifted into absolute happiness by the coming of a baby, which had neither intellect, nor reason, nor feeling, but only utter dependence and helplessness to recommend it! He had tried to account for it in a hundred different ways, and he had failed; and finally had taken refuge in the well-worn conclusion that women were inexplicable, and not to be judged by ordinary rules. This want of comprehension made the new event he had just heard of doubly significant. Here was life coming back to her, life for herself, not the inconceivable absorption into another life which had made her, as she thought, "happy" with her baby.

The Dominie stood by his own door, looking across at the Manse with the lights in all its windows, and the movement of a large family making itself visible somehow even to the outside world. That very day Isabel had looked at the house which was once her own, and seen its new inmates in it, and felt no pang and no offence. But her husband's friend regarded it with the most irrational sense of offence. How foolishly, strangely, tenderly happy his old companion had been, not much more than a year ago, with the young creature by his side, who might have been his daughter, and was his wife! What a perplexing, touching scene

had been to the spectator's sympathetic, affection
ndering eyes! He himself had looked on at
se mysteries of nature with a smile, which was
norance and half pity, and yet had a touch of s
thy, if not envy, in it too. No, not envy. Yet
minie could not but remember that he had b
ry for himself now and then when he left the
ls' paradise—the Eden out of date—in which
nister had found shelter; and now all this was sw
m the earth as if it had never been. And
thian's wife might be Stapylton's, as his church
house was now another man's, before many d
d passed. The heart of the old man, who had noth
do with all those cruelties of life in his own per
ntracted within him as he stood and gazed as it w
what had been and what might be. Oh, the
it! the wonder of it! One coming and another go
not only life ending, but love ending and happin
d then beginning again with another—always rec
ncing, running once more the repeated round;
thing faithful, nothing stedfast, no remembranc
rth beneath or heaven above.

Youth has the faculty of eclectic belief and ecle
sion; of seeing only the points that suit its fresh
rtain theories, and ignoring all that thwarts
stroys. But the eye of experience is more reali
he Dominie saw everything justly. He felt with
nctive certainty what the result must be, and he
t blame Isabel. She had not loved her husb
her husband had loved her; and yet it parti
nded him to think that she had been happy in
thian's tender guardianship—she who now would
ppy with another man. Was it possible that hur

nature was made so?—to have, not one life, but two or three lives, as circumstances might guide—to be happy and then sorrowful, and then happy again, knitting up the severed thread as if nothing had happened? And whose should she be after the resurrection, as the Sadducees asked? Should there be new loves then, and an awful indifference to all the ties of earth? Would it no longer matter to a man whose was his wife's heart? The spectator muttered something, which might have been an oath or a prayer, one could not tell which—and was in reality but an outcry of that despair with which every thoughtful soul is forced at last to turn away from the contemplation of the wonders of the moral world—and went into his lonely little house, and closed the door upon that great, silent, incomprehensible earth. Isabel, with her heart rent in twain, was at that moment trying to close her eyes and sleep by her child's side, and was no more happy, no more satisfied than he was. And the soft summer moon, half visible in the mist of light which hung between the waning and the coming day, looked down unmoved upon both. Heaven took no notice of the new, though it enshrouded the old, but left humanity to solve its own problems, awaiting the grand explanation, which comes only when earth and human life are ended, like a tale that is told.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE morning rose anxiously over all the personages of this little drama. Isabel, sleepless, fatigued, and unresolved, rose pale to the new day which she felt might

bring change incalculable to her life. And Jean woke with her heart aching uneasily with all the renewed sorrows and anxieties which she had so many times discussed with herself. If it had been with alarm that she contemplated the idea of Isabel's first marriage, Stapylton filled her with still livelier dismay. He had impressed a conception of himself upon the countryside in general which might be true or a fiction, but which was not encouraging to a woman in Jean's position. "He'll leave me my house in peace," said Jean to herself; "and it's little he'll heed onything that Margret said about Jamie's schooling. My term day's come, if she takes up with *him*." She watched her stepdaughter with a woman's close and anxious scrutiny during the long morning, and concluded, by a hundred signs, imperceptible to a less close observer, that Isabel's mind was full, not of the past, as she had at first hoped, but of an agitating present. The way in which she tended her child—now passionately caressing, now thwarting her with almost severity, now dropping into listless inattention, and forgetting for the moment her very existence—her restlessness and inability to keep still, the way in which she stood by the window, gazing and gazing as if she expected some one, all suggested something more exciting than the warmest tide of recollections. Jean, who kept hovering about her, watching with keen attention every movement she made, increased Isabel's suppressed agitation. There was a permanent flush on her face; her eyes were abstracted, and took little note of what was going on. She seemed scarcely aware of the passage of time, and was irritated when she was called upon to sit down at the table and eat, and go through all the ordinary domestic routine.

"Oh, if you would leave me quiet!" she exclaimed, half unconsciously, turning away her face from the scrutiny of which she was only half aware.

"My bonnie woman! you're no weel?" said Jean.

"I am quite well; there is nothing the matter with me. I have—a headache. I don't feel—able to talk," said Isabel, stumbling from one sentence to another. And then she wound up with the plaint of weariness, so familiar in its sound, "Oh, if you would let me be!"

Let her alone—leave her to revolve and revolve the questions that were rushing through her mind in endless succession without any answer! Poor Jean did her best to answer this prayer. She went and shut herself up in the kitchen with her children, and gave them their dinner. And then she thought the broth was exceptionally good, and that fasting was bad for a headache; so she got up from her own meal and carried a basin of the family soup into the parlour. "They're real good the day," she said, wistfully; "try a spoonfu', Isabel."

Isabel was standing at the window once more looking out. She turned round quickly at the sound of the opening door, and a blaze of momentary anger came across her face. "No, no," she said, "I could not eat;" and sat down suddenly, drawing her work to her. Jean stood in the doorway and gazed, holding always the basin in her hand.

"Are you looking for somebody?" she said. "Oh, Isabel, if you would but tell me! There's something wrong, but what it is I canna tell."

"There is nothing wrong," said Isabel; and for a moment her needle flew through her work, while Jean

ood looking at her. Then she roused to impati
ain, "I said I had a headache; if you would l
e quiet, just for a little while——!"

"I'll do that, my bonnie woman," said Jean;
ithdrew regretfully with her broth. But before
sumed her place at the table another thought st
r. This time it was a glass of wine she carried
e parlour. "No to disturb you, Isabel," she
but a young thing like you shouldna fast so l
ve brought you a glass of sherry-wine; it's no i
ke and it will keep your heart——"

"I want nothing, thank you," said Isabel.

"But you'll take it to please me," said Jean.
en a knock at the door made them both start. Is
ithout speaking, raised her eyes with a dumb, wi
ppeal to the only comforter within her reach.
ean, in her agitation, spilled the wine as she pl
; on the table. "It's maybe naebody," she said,
udden comprehension, and with a yearning of
eart over the child about to be exposed to danger
rial.

"What will I do?" cried Isabel, clasping her ha

"Oh, Isabel, think of the bairn, and the Lord
e a guide to you," said Jean, with tears in her
Not a word of explanation had passed between t
ut the elder woman came and kissed the younger
ith a sudden understanding of the conflict and stru
uch as no words could have conveyed to her. T
e knock was repeated, and Jean hurried awa
pen the door, wiping her hands with her apron.
wn anxieties and jealousies were all quenched
oment in that rush of genuine sympathy. "Fo
ye likit the lad!" Jean said to herself, feeling b

stinct that poor Isabel had traitors within as well as temptations without.

It was, however, not Stapylton, but the Dominie who stood waiting at the door; and the revulsion of feeling was such that Jean could scarcely be civil to Mr. Galbraith. "Oh, ay, she's ben the house; but she's no weel the day, and I canna have her vexed," said Isabel's anxious guardian, looking jealously at this new disturber of her repose.

"I'm sorry she's not well; but I have not come to vex her," said the Dominie. His reception was so strange a one that it was not wonderful if it startled him. When he went into the parlour he met the wistful gaze of Isabel's dilated, excited eyes; but when she saw it was him, and not another, her look changed in a moment, and she fell into a sudden outburst of tears. Disappointment, relief, a strain of feeling which he could not understand, was in the sudden change which came over her face—and the Dominie, being but a man, was not so quick of apprehension as Jean.

"I have startled you, my dear," he said.

"Oh, not startled—" said Isabel; "but—my head aches; and—I was not expecting you—and——"

The explanation fell into a broken murmur of words; and she dried her tears hastily with an agitated hand. The Dominie had come with the intention of saying some word of warning; though how it was to be introduced, or what kind of warning it was to be, he could not have told any one. He had hoped that circumstances might have led to some remark about the strangers in the parish, and that he would have said something which should "put her on her guard." Such warnings seem so much easier to give when the person

e be warned is not present. He sat down by h
er little parlour, and found that, so far as his mi
ras concerned, he had not a word to say.

"What would you say to a change of air," sai
Dominie, "if you are not well?"

"You forget I have just come home."

"And so I did," he said. "But I do not like
uild inland places like the Bridge of Allan. If
ere to go to the sea, or to the hills——"

"I am best at home," said Isabel.

And then there was a dead pause. She had t
er work, and was labouring against time, her n
lying through the linen, her head bent down ov
Mr. Galbraith gave a quiet sigh, and felt himself
ed. He did not know how to introduce his sul
ad he could not understand the state of suppr
xcitement in which she evidently was.

"There are a great many strangers in the p
ast now," he said, at last, himself making the re
hich he had hoped might have come from her, '
me that are not strangers altogether. I hear,
othian, that you've been at Ardnamore?"

"Yes, I've been at Ardnamore."

"And you've seen them *all?*" asked Mr. Galbr
ith emphasis.

"I have seen Ailie and—Mr. John," she
ising her eyes to his face. (It seemed to her, a
poke, that there was another step on the road,
at she could hear it pause at the cottage-door;
a her trouble she betook herself to craft, as
atural.) "But you must not ask me about them,'
aid; "it was more—than I could bear. It—bro

everything back. It is that, I suppose, that has made me so foolish to-day."

"It can never be foolish to remember what is past," said the Dominie, reassured. "Don't drive the thought from you, as silly folk tell you. The past is precious; sometimes it is all that is left to us. You are young, and you have your child; but I doubt if you will ever have such a treasure as yon year. Isabel, my dear, I've seen you a bairn, though you were my friend's wife. Think on him still. There are few such seen in this life."

"I know that well," said Isabel, glad, poor child, in unconscious hypocrisy to secure thus a pretence for her too ready tears.

"Ay, think upon him!" said the Dominie. "You're bonnie and young, and may get the offer of many a man; but, perhaps, never another like him—most likely never another like him. You should be proud of the past. You have had one of the best men that ever was born; and if you had been an angel out of heaven, he could not have set you up higher, or made more of you. Isabel, sometimes you must think of that!"

"Oh, I think of it!" said Isabel, with streaming eyes. And the Dominie drew his large hand over the great caves that lay under his eyebrows; his heavy eyelids were wet, and the muscles quivering about his mouth. He did not attempt to explain to her, nor even to himself, why he was so much in earnest, why he addressed her in so solemn a strain. It seemed natural. As for Isabel she wanted no explanation; she was neither offended, nor even surprised. The very atmosphere around her spoke to her as plainly as he had spoken. At such a crisis it was but natural that every

one should be moved, even stocks and stones if that could be.

"And now I must go away," he said, rising, with a smile gleaming out under the unshed tear. "It's the hour of the bairns' dinner, and a kind of necessity was upon me to come and see you. No; I'll take nothing. The afternoon school is not so long. God bless you, Isabel! and guide you aright—in——"

He broke off in the middle of the sentence, as if (she thought) there was something he could not trust himself to say—and went away without looking round, or adding any ordinary farewell. But his agitation did not wound or even surprise Isabel. She dried her own wet eyes when he was gone, and tried to throw herself back, as he had told her, into "yon year,"—the year of her marriage—when she had been worshipped like something divine, and guarded as the apple of her husband's eyes. "You should be proud of the past," her Mentor had said. And Isabel had strained at it, trying with all her might to bring it back to her mind; but could not. Her imagination rushed instead to that meeting on the hill-side under Ardnamore, to every word, every look, every tone of that strange interview. Oh, how bitter it was, to be unable to control her thoughts, or turn them as she would, or keep them to matters which her mind could approve. They escaped from her with a leap to go to *him;* and with a guilty pang at her heart, Isabel felt that the bitter was not so poignant, not so irresistible as the sweet.

Baby Margaret woke, and began to cry from the inner room, while her mother sat lost in this struggle. Isabel rose with the alacrity of custom to take the child; *but Jean rushed* suddenly in before her, and had

the infant in her arms before the mother could reach it. Jean was pale, and her eyes were all a-glow with excitement. "Na, na," she said, holding the child fast, "leave her with me. There's ane coming up the brae, Isabel, that ye'll have to see."

"Give me my bairn," said the poor young mother, with a cry; and then she sank trembling in a chair, her very limbs failing under her. Half defiant, half sympathetic, Jean stood before her with the baby in her arms.

"It's no fit she should be here. You'll have to see him, and to say what's to be. But, oh, Isabel, dinna forget that you have a bairn!" said Jean, with sudden tears.

"No till I forget myself," said Isabel, not knowing what she said; and then there was a sudden stillness round her, and she became aware that she was face to face with her fate.

There are many different kinds of love in this variable world. There is the simple passion which believes and adores—and there is the calmer affection which can understand that its object is not faultless, and yet love all the same; but there is another kind of love, more tragical, more profound, perhaps more irresistible than any of these. It is when a woman knows in her heart that she cannot rely on a man, cannot admire, or praise, or reverence him; knows his weakness, his doubtful character, a hundred lessening things—and yet loves him with a foolish, disinterested passion which she cannot overcome. It is a woman who does this chiefly, though there are men, too, capable of it. Isabel raised her eyes, which were veiled with dreams, yet shining with suppressed ex-

citement, to the face of Stapylton, who stood looking down upon her. The man who had tried to beguile her from her last duty to Margaret,—who had wooed her and tempted her, and almost spurned her on the braes,—who had written that letter,—who had left her for a whole year alone to comfort herself as she might, before she could consent to permit the other truer, generous love to console her in her solitude. All this rushed through her mind as she looked up at him; and at the same moment her heart flew from her like a bird, and took refuge, as it were, in his breast. She had no power to help herself.

"Isabel," he said, "I have come to say what you would not let me say yesterday. Why should we keep apart, you and I? I have not come to speak of the past—not a word. Thank Heaven it is over. It shall never be mentioned between us. You were my Isabel when my father sent for me; be my Isabel now."

"How can that be?" she said, under her breath.

"It can be," he answered, bending down over her; and—it was not self-delusion on her part—there was a softness in his voice, a tenderness that had never been there before. For the first time Isabel felt a certainty that he was thinking of her, how to be most gentle to her, how to please and to move her, more than of himself. "I might have looked for you on the hills as I used to do," he went on, "but I thought it was best to come here to your own home. Isabel, there is no time for courting now. We cannot play with the thought, and quarrel, and make friends, as we used to do. Life is more serious nowadays. We must be man and wife!"

"*You are not the* judge, Mr. Stapylton," she cried,

with a touch of her old impatience; "it is for me to settle that, and not you."

"But you will settle it, Isabel. We are older, we should know our own minds, and the time for the braes is over," he said. "Isabel! you have never been out of my heart. I tried to forget you at first, and then — but I said there was to be nothing of the past."

"You succeeded well," said Isabel, "in forgetting me. There was a year—a whole year—"

He sat down by her and took her hand. She had given up the contest when she thus upbraided him; and it seemed to her, as he seated himself by her side, that a strange long dream was over, and that all things were again as they had been when the two had met upon the braes.

"I was not a free man," he said; "my father was lying dying, and he would not die. Don't question me of that. Is it not all past? And, my darling, you are mine again."

"No; oh no," she cried, with a little instinctive shudder, drawing back; "there was more,—far more, than that."

"What more?" he was pale with the suspense and with eagerness. He stretched out his hand again to claim hers, which she had withdrawn. "Yes, there was more," he continued, looking fixedly in her face; "would to God I could forget the rest!"

A flush of shame rushed over Isabel's cheeks. At that moment, when he professed for her a constant love which had known no interruption, what could she say of her own marriage; how could she even think of it? Was it not treachery, almost vice? The colour came up like flame over her face. She felt their pos-

ons changed at once, and she herself put tc
ar.

"I was alone in the world," she said, "a
ad not heard of you,—not a word, for a y
ear."

Now, indeed, he got her hand into his, anc
mphed over all her pretence at indifference. She
egun to excuse herself, almost to beg his pa
We will speak of it no more," he said; "now
abel is mine again we'll think of it no more."

"Oh! hush, hush, I never said that," she
vading his caress. But he was close by her as i
ld days; his voice, so much softened, in her ea
at voice which had first woke echoes in her
eart; his hand holding hers, and her heart mel
earning to her first love. How could she resist
im only, but herself? She had no heart to say
ay. After this sudden renewal what would be
f her if life settled down again in its grey col
nd he disappeared out of it once more for ever
ionth ago that subdued life, with her child in i
unshine, had been very sweet—but now?

And yet, in the very happiness that thus stole
er, there was a grasp and constriction in her th
s of guilt and pain. She was doing something
hich she could never have anything but blame
erself or from others—for which she could not de
erself. Her reason seemed to stand by disappro
egretful, while the poor heart of her made the pl
The one was no help to the other. Her unity of l
as all torn asunder and made an end of. She
ot think this in so many words, but was vag
imly conscious of it, as the happiness stole floc

through her, penetrating every nook and corner. "Oh, Horace! do you not feel as if it should not be?" she said, with one last effort to resist.

"I feel that it ought to be," he said, drawing her close to him. "If you wish me to have a hope in the world,—if you would not see me perish; not for your sake, Isabel, that are innocent, but for my sake——"

"Are you not innocent?" she said, gazing at him with wonder and alarm in her great, tear-dilated eyes.

He put his head down upon her arm, upon the sleeve of her black dress, and kissed that. He had her hand in his, but it was not her hand which he touched with his trembling lips. And she felt that he trembled. For the first time his heart was so touched that the very frame felt the vibration. It was so different from his composure of old, that it moved Isabel beyond expression. When he answered her with an almost groan, his voice half stifled by his attitude, she leaned over him to catch what he said, as if it had been the most precious utterance. "Not innocent like you," he said, sighing, almost moaning as from a heavy heart. And she melted and yearned over him like a mother over a child.

"Oh, Horace, if you have done wrong we will set it right!" she said, unconscious of the vast pledge she took. And thus the contest was ended, and all the struggles of reason made an end of it in one outburst of that enthusiasm of pity and tenderness which raises innocent love to the height of passion. The moment she could escape from him, Isabel rushed to the door without saying a word. She opened it, all radiant yet all tearful, her eyes shining, her face full of soft colour,

the lines of her mouth quivering with sobs and smiles. Outside, Jean was walking about, very grave and almost stern, with Baby Margaret lying on her shoulder; hushing, or trying to hush, the child to sleep. But the child had no intention of sleeping; she lay with her head over Jean's shoulder, and two great grave eyes gazing intent into the summer air in that wonderful abstraction of childhood which is so mysterious and unfathomable. To her excited mother it seemed as if the child already disapproved and protested, and was saddened by the event which she could not understand. Isabel snatched her baby out of her stepmother's arms, who gazed at her like Margaret, and understood better why this sudden movement was. She felt the momentary chill strike to her heart; but did not stop to realize it. Without saying a word, she returned again into the parlour where Stapylton sat surprised awaiting her. He, too, understood her meaning when she reappeared with her child in her arms. She came up to him with two great tears running over from her brilliant, excited eyes; her mouth quivering so that she could scarcely speak; yet smiling. She held out her baby to him without a word. Perhaps it was that he had not expected, had not thought of this little living evidence of the ineffaceable past. He rose to his feet with a sudden hoarse exclamation. The joy in his face sank into a momentary wildness, almost horror; and he trembled as the child's unconscious, solemn eyes gazed at him. Another pang and chill came over Isabel; she had thought he would have taken the child from her, and kissed it, and vowed some tender vow of protection and love. But this, too, was momentary, and passed before she had time to realize it. He did not take the

child, but he took the mother into his arms, embracing the bewildered baby also without touching her. "She shall be my child," he said.

His child! Isabel broke away from him, and clasped her baby to her bosom, and sat down apart and cried. Ah, no! For the first time a distinct sense of the claims of the other who was dead and gone, but who was little Margaret's father, came with a certain sickening pang to her heart. His wife might go from him and be another man's wife: could his child, too, be another man's child, and every trace of him disappear from the earth? Ah, no!—once more, no!—She said nothing, restrained, even at that moment, by the strange, new, instinctive sense that she must not breathe a word that could suggest prejudice or dislike to the mind of her lover in respect to her child; but in her heart there rose a certain jealousy of him for her dead husband's sake, a remorse and compunction unspeakable. She had given herself up to him; she had appealed to him, with moving looks and gestures, to take her child too into his heart; and yet her whole being roused into contradiction of his claim, into dumb indignant assertion of the real father's right, as soon as he responded to her appeal. She sat apart from him, not looking at him, holding little Margaret to her heart and weeping hot tears with a vehemence which Stapylton could not understand. And she could not understand it herself; she could do nothing but weep her passion out, already putting restraint upon her tongue, feeling instinctively that her freedom had gone from her, that she dared not say to him in his moment of triumph what sudden thought had arisen in her mind. Thus it was with poor Isabel, in the moment of what might have been

her triumph too, when she gave up her heart and her life into the hands of the only man she had ever loved.

CHAPTER XVIII.

They were married very shortly after—there being no reason why they should wait. Nobody approved of them nor of their match, nor would have been likely to do so had they waited half-a-dozen years. Their little world stood round, as it were, and gazed upon them, declaring it washed its hands of all responsibility. It was "their own doing;"—"As they have brewed so must they drink;"—"She has made her bed, and she must lie on it." Such were the remarks made in the parish. And yet nobody could have made any decided charge against Stapylton. Somehow he had acquired for himself an ill name in the country-side, even when he was known only as "the English lad," a comparatively innocent title; but the indignation of the parish was so great and strong against Isabel for being capable of thinking of another husband, that nobody was sorry for her. Miss Catherine was known to be bitterly opposed to it; so were the other Diarmids in the parish who were connected with Mrs. Lothian; and though such excuses were made among her friends, as that she was young, and her husband had been old, and Stapylton was her first love; yet nobody ventured to defend what she was doing, or to plead that public favour might be re-extended to her. And she was not unaware of this prevailing feeling. In the depths of her heart, indeed, Isabel knew that she, too, would have condemned any

woman who had taken such a step; and that the haste with which it was done was unseemly and a shame to her—she on whose head shame had never come before. But what was she to do? She had no one to consult who had authority over her. She had no old tie to break. Sometimes, in the course of her short engagement, it would come into her heart to wish that he had never come back; that her content and stillness had never been disturbed; that she had been left in the silent life which now, alas! seemed to her no life at all. But he *had* come, and the icebound springs had gushed forth, and there was but one thing to be done. Accident (as it now seemed) had parted them before; but nothing could be permitted to intervene when they had thus recovered each other. It might have been postponed had he stayed away; but it could not be postponed now. And the general disapprobation had an effect upon her which nothing else in her life had ever had: she had never known, never encountered it before—it startled her, and then it irritated and hardened her against all interference. When she found that the world stood apart and gave her no sympathy, she turned her back upon the world. She suffered her love to absorb her; she turned altogether, with every faculty and thought, to the only being who loved her. The less comfort she had from abroad the more absolutely was she thrown upon him. Her stepmother went about the house as if she were assisting at a funeral—even little Mary turned reproachful eyes upon her. "Poor wee baby!—Poor wee Margret!" she would say, caressing the child. "Why is she *poor* baby?" said Isabel, and little Mary would sigh and shake her head. As for Miss Catherine, she made a

formal proposal to take the child under her own care, and leave Mrs. Lothian to "her other duties."

"A bairn in the house will be an interruption," she said. "A man with a young wife is often impatient enough of a baby of his own; and ye cannot expect he would be more tender to another man's child."

"She is my child!" said Isabel, holding her baby tightly strained in her arms.

"But she is my dear old friend's child as well," said Miss Catherine; "and she should not be brought up in ignorance of her father's very name."

"Oh, Miss Catherine, you are hard,—hard!" cried Isabel. "If he was your friend, he was my husband, and knew all, and would never, never have judged me like this!"

"Isabel Diarmid," said Miss Catherine, sternly, "it's little more than a year since he was brought home to his house to die, and for a time I thought it was your death-blow too; and now, with your baby in your arms, you are going to wed another man. You should not speak of harsh judgment to me."

"But I must," said poor Isabel. "Oh, Miss Catherine, if you would but think how it all was. Can I put it in words? I was fond—fond of him—and oh! but he was good to me. But you know—the difference; and if you had said a month since,—*He* is coming; let us fly away, not to meet him, not to bring back the past,—I would have gone to the end of the world. I would be—almost—glad—now——"

"Of what, Isabel?" cried Miss Catherine. "My dear, my dear, come, and I will go with you, and free you from this man!"

"I can never be free of him—now!" she said. "To say the words is an offence to me. I would have clung to my old life, to be Mr. Lothian's widow and little Margaret's mother, and nothing more; but now that is all past. If that was what you wanted, why did you let me see the one man—the only man——"

Here Isabel stopped, silenced by her sobs and her shame. She was not ashamed to love him, but she was ashamed to say it in words, to disclose the sacred depths of the heart to any strange eye. She bent her crimson tear-wet face over her child. Poor little Margaret! if she could have known the meaning of all those looks of trouble, and passion, and distress, at which she gazed so gravely with profound baby eyes! Miss Catherine rose up and shook out her dress with an agitated movement, as if shaking the very dust from it, according to scriptural injunction; and yet she had been touched, though she would not admit it, by Isabel's cry.

"You must judge for yourself," she said. "All has been said that can be said. I cannot change your heart or settle your life for you, one way or another. You must do as you will. You know what I think, and what a sore blow this is to me; and I can say no more."

And Miss Catherine swept out of the room and out of the house, leaving poor Isabel with her face hidden and her heart torn asunder. What was she to do? Oh, if he had not come! Oh, if he had come later, when it would have been less shocking to others, less terrible to herself! She cried out her sorrows inarticulately before God, who, like man, seemed to be

ard upon her. She had pondered, and struggled, cided, as she thought this bewildering life-prol ace, not without the painful sacrifice of man ream. Most women had to do it but once in t ves; but to her the ordeal had come twice, and) short an interval between! What was she to eny her heart once more, and listen to reason lvice, and what other people thought?—or put it tc uch, for dear love's sake,—for *his* sake—to win a se all? Isabel owned to herself that she was not dent and secure, as brides usually are. She c st say, even to her own heart, that it was the l e highest, the noblest man she was about to ' er heart ached with many a doubt, with wonder certainty, and the chilling sense that she was i nt of what she ought to be acquainted with— owing his past, nor his friends, nor any of the n tails which clear up a personal history. She st know what he had been doing for these t ars of absence; she had no clue to the meanin s vague self-accusations. She had none of that ctive trust in him which might have seemed nat her position. She loved him—that was all—b thousand times than herself; not better, but wi ve more *exigeant*, more absorbing than that she l r child. Life without him *now* seemed to her no d he had such need of her. And what could ?

It did not even strike Isabel as strange that ceived no overtures of friendship from his fan r, indeed, heard of them in any way. Her emed too far removed out of the ordinary cours le to leave her any interest in ordinary circumstar

She never thought of his people; all who surrounded herself were hostile or disapproving, and the effect upon her was to make her independent (as she thought) of sympathy. Offended, embittered, cast back upon herself, she took refuge entirely with her lover; and she found in him, what she could never have hoped to find, a certain tender consideration and sympathy for her, which she perceived with fond delight and surprise—unexpected blessings. He had not been used, in the old days, to put her on any pedestal; but now she was grateful to him for his gratitude, for his admiration, for his compassion. She tried to shut out from her eyes the disapproving looks, the constrained courtesies, the cold words she received from others, and to fix all her attention on him and receive all her comfort from him. The world was hard upon her, and she turned her back upon the world.

And thus it happened that they were married, without paying any attention to the objections and protestations of Loch Diarmid. It was in the beginning of winter when little Margaret was nearly a year old. Margaret's father had been but a year and a half dead, which was the fact that chiefly shocked the parish. "I'm no saying she should have stayed a widow all her days," said one of the village wives. "She was but a young thing and that I would never say;—a widow that's left a widow at three-and-twenty, is no like her that's been a man's wife twenty years or more. I am aye for justice, whatever ye say."

"If it had been a decent man come of kent folk, and that might have been some credit to her friends," said Jenny Spence; "but an English lad no much older than herself, and without a creature to stand for him

Na, na, I'm her connexion by the father's side; but I wash my hands o' Isabel."

"Poor bit thing!" said a more charitable critic. "The minister was more like her father than her man. And she's shown a' respect to his memory; and syne when her lad that she likit came back——"

"When a woman's ance a married wife, she has nae right to mind what lad she might have ance likit," said Jenny, with indignant virtue. "Me, would *I* mind upon every haverel that thought me a bonnie lass in my day,—na, no, for a' the lads in the world; if our John were to die the morn——"

"You're no just Isabel's age after a'. And John and you were a weel-matched couple. It's nae example," said the good-natured friend.

"Example!" said Jenny, "a bonnie example ye would set before us a'! The man no eighteen months dead, and such a man! And her takin' up with the first that offered. No eighteen months dead!—It's that I'm thinking of. Eh, woman, the discredit to everybody belonging to her!—I've nae patience to think of Isabel."

"She's but a young thing," cried her advocate, deprecatingly; and that was the most that any one could say.

Nor was she less hardly dealt with in the smithy, notwithstanding the superior charity of men for culprits of such a kind. "That's your women!" said John Macwhirter, with scorn, "bonnie creatures for a man to waste his life upon! One or another, it's a' the same to them. Ne'er ane of us, if we were dead the morn, but would be served the same."

"*There's the sting,*" said Peter Chalmers. He had

a sair head this morning after Kilcranion fair; and the like of that brings it home. "If you were dead the morn, John, as you say, the mistress would look out a likely lad before the year was done—"

"I would advise you to hold your tongue," said old Sandy Diarmid, in an under-tone; "a man may joke, or he may say a bitter word when he takes it in his ain head; but he'll no bear it from another man."

"I'm no speaking of the mistress," said John, "and I advise ye to keep a civil tongue in your head. I'm speaking of women in the abstract. The minister was a real fine man. There was nae sham about him. He was as honest as I am myself, and saw things maybe as clear. And now his wife will be another man's wife, and his wean another man's wean. Lord, that's the worst of a'. I aye likit the lass, and I'm awfu' vexed to change my mind; but to blot out a man's name out of the earth, and give wife and wean and lands and gear to another man! Lord, it puts ye wild to think o' 't—there's some things ye canna forgive!"

"For my part," said old Sandy, "I hope he'll be kind to the poor wean. There was naething else to be expected with sic a young widow: it should be a lesson to auld fools—a man of fifty and a lass of twenty! Ye canna reconcile that to nature, argue as ye like."

"Nature may gang to—Jericho for me," said the excited blacksmith, "man, we're no a' brute beasts! Is there naething but nature to guide a lass that's been a man's wife, and borne him a bairn? Say love's naething, is law naething, and honour, and credit? A woman's a responsible being after a', though she may

be a fool. Is she to blot out a man's name and memory out of the earth, because she's young and light-headed? Na, na, I've lost a' conceit for my part, of bonnie Isabel."

"She's but a woman when a' 's said," said Peter Chalmers. "I agree with Sandy, it was to be expected. I am never astonished at anything they do. I hear he's bought a heap of Archie Smeaton's stock. It canna be to take to England with him. Are they to bide in the parish and brave it a' out?"

"I hope he'll take her a thousand miles out of this," said the indignant John. But no one could throw any light on that subject. Even Isabel herself, confused as she was and bewildered by a hundred different cares, had no distinct understanding what was to become of them after the marriage which should place so great a gulf between her present and her past. The one detail connected with it which she had power to master was that for the first time she must leave her baby behind her when she went away with her new husband. Even that fact, however, though it came upon her now and then with a sharp, sudden pang, was thrust aside by the graver preliminaries of the wedding. Isabel Diarmid, with her little patrimony and her cottage, was a different person from Mrs. Lothian made rich by her kind husband, and with her child, and her dependants, to provide for. Naturally it was not until all the convulsions of feeling within her were quieted down by her decision to marry Stapylton, that any thought of other matters came into her mind. But when her new life began to rise before her as an actual, almost present reality,—when the rest of the world turned from her, and left her to

feel that she must guide and conclude her fate for herself,—when Miss Catherine swept indignant out of the house, and Jean went and came with averted face, and even little Mary disapproved of her sister, a great revolution took place in Isabel. All at once, even while she wept with a distracted heart, like a girl as she was, over the painful disruption of her life, and asked of heaven and earth what she was to do, and felt that she could do nothing but throw herself into the arms of love open to receive her—another creature, a graver, wiser being, was developing in the young woman's soul. She, too, had felt with a poignant sense of guilt and misery that she was blotting out her husband's name and remembrance from the earth. She had not been able to bear that her lover should call little Margaret *his* child. And in the many silent hours she had to spend alone, when Stapylton was absent from her, and none of her old friends, not even her stepmother, countenanced her with their sympathy, that sense of her position as a responsible being, which the blacksmith indignantly supposed her to have lost, rose stronger and stronger, more and more painfully, within her. She had her child to consider, she had to think of the little household at the Glebe, confided to her by nature, by Margaret, by kindly home-affection. Jean was too proud now to say a word; not even for her boy's claims would she stoop to remonstrate or make a supplicant of herself. "If she forgets a' else, she may weel forget me," Jean said to herself with unbending dignity. She would not yield so far as to discuss any after-arrangements with her step-daughter. Even that would look like approval of her conduct, and Jean would have died rather than have been sup-

posed to approve. "Ye should mind her of what Margaret aye said about Jamie. Ye should ask her her meaning about the Glebe. Woman, I wouldna let everything gang without a word!" said her advisers in the village, and especially Jenny Spence, who, as a connexion, was doubly wroth that everything which belonged to the Diarmids should pass into the hands of "yon English lad."

"No, no!" said Jean; "we've no claim, neither Jamie nor one of us. It was her mother's siller, and no the Captain's, as ye ken as weel as me."

"And if it was her mother's siller!" cried Jenny Spence. "Lord bless us, what's a woman's siller but for the good of her man and her bairns? and if Jamie's no her son, he's her man's son. Miss Margaret Diarmid, that was this Isabel's mother,—that was the Captain's first wife—was just one of the angels like her other daughter. Ye canna think, Jean Campbell, it would have been her wish to leave you unprovided for in the world with your twa bairns?"

"If she had kent anything about my bairns or me," said Jean, without any sense of the humour of the suggestion, but yet puzzled by the bewildering confusion of relationships.

"But this one kens," said Jenny, indignantly; "and if Margaret had but had the thought to say, if Isabel went wrang that a' the siller was to come to you—"

"Whisht! whisht!" said Jean, impatiently; "she has a right to do as she likes. I canna say I approve; but the siller is her ain siller, and she has nae call to ask consent from a' the Loch."

"A *lass that respected* herself—no to say a married

wife that should know better—would take advice from her connexions," said Jenny, with warmth; "but to let a' gang without a word, and Jamie's schooling that you had set your heart on——"

"I can work for my own," said Jean, with her firm lip trembling; "but I wouldna ask a sixpence from Isabel,—no to save my life."

Such was the silence, full of indignant murmurs, full of unexpressed reproach, and injury, and suffering, which surrounded Isabel, Miss Catherine tossed an angry word of advice that she should not altogether forget her child's interest at her, like a stone, during their last interview; but no one else said a word. Poor Isabel, wounded and suffering herself, turned it all over in her mind as she sat alone, with that strange, suppressed, unacknowledged sense of want of confidence in her lover, which ran through the whole of her thoughts like a secret poison, and the result was that she took the first decisive step for herself which she had yet taken in the world. She sent for the lawyer who had managed Mr. Lothian's affairs, and confided to him all her wishes for her child, and for her father's family. Jean might be hard upon her, but she would not leave her unprovided. When Stapylton heard of the proposed arrangements, his face changed a little out of the softness it had begun to wear, and for a moment he was silent, with his lips close shut, and his face darkened, as by a cloud. She watched him with an intense, feverish anxiety which she could scarcely conceal. And when the cloud cleared off, and his face resumed its new amiability, the relief in Isabel's heart was indescribable. She felt herself justified in her choice, set right before heaven

and earth, as it were, by the lightening of his face. When he said, "You are quite right," he made her heart sing for joy. It was not that she had thought him mercenary, or believed that he sought her for the sake of what she possessed; but still the doubt that was in her kept gnawing and aching; and from this moment it was relieved and stilled. When he himself volunteered to take the matter in hand, and arranged that the bulk of her father's fortune should be settled on little Margaret, and that Jean should have half of the original little inheritance of the two sisters, the first exquisite feeling of approval came into Isabel's mind. She was more blessed than she had ever hoped to be. She was so happy that she forgave the countryside for its foolish condemnation. She, too, if she had not condemned, had at least doubted Horace; and now to find in him not only the object of her unreasoning love, but a man to approve, to applaud, to be proud of, how sweet it was! Her heart swelled with happiness, and a consciousness of unexpected, unhoped-for joy. And she had not looked for joy in her new marriage; she had scarcely expected happiness. She had engaged to do it for pure love—love that was not faith, and scarcely was hope. It seemed to her now that her boldness was winning blessings for them both. Actual happiness began to thrill in her heart. There was no more of the old selfishness, the old querulousness, in his manner; but that tender regard for herself which was precious to her, not so much for herself, but as a pledge of excellence in him. She watched him with that close inspection of watchful love which sees every defect, and with a swell of delight said to herself that he was a changed man. With this dawning

of new blessedness in her, hope springing high, and timid joy coming in, she stood by his side, not in Margaret's parlour, with all its associations, where her first marriage had taken place, but in the new room which had been added to the cottage, and was married to her first love. Her first and only love—for was not all the tragic brief story which had intervened no more and no other than a dream?

CHAPTER XIX.

STAPYLTON took his bride to a pretty sea-side village further down the Clyde where the winter was mild, and where there were no associations to disturb the peace of their beginning. He bore with her in her distress at that temporary parting with her child,—he bore with her anxieties about little Margaret and longings after her, in the little interval which he might have claimed as specially his own. He was thoughtful of her every wish, putting aside his own comfort (she thought) for hers. And Isabel found herself, all unawares, rapt in that dream of happiness which most hearts entertain one time or other, and which so few realize. Out of her doubts she came into a sense of reality which was exquisite to her—and she who had loved her lover without believing in him, grew, with a blessed surprise and delight, which was like heaven to her, to trust as much as she loved. The change was like that from night into the brightest day. She had reached the heights all radiant with the sun rising, after the valley of the shadow of death.

"You have been a bride of brides," he said to her

day, when a few weeks of this dream had go
ou have never asked me where we were to go,
at we were to do. I wish I could reward you
ir trust, my love, and take you to a fine castle, ε
you were queen——"

"It was not that," said Isabel, "don't praise me
ch. It was because I had so much in my min
got. But, Horace, it is trust now."

"And that is all I want," he said, "and we
tle together where we are to go."

"But you have your own home?" said Isabel.

"I sold that; did I never tell you? I have no
t you now," he said. "I meant to have gone
nerica,—two years ago. Shall we go now?
ll we stay in your own country? or what are
do?"

"I have been a fool," cried Isabel, "to think
thing all this time. But you must have had plans
ir own."

"Yes, to disappear out of the world if you wo
t have me," he said; "but since I knew you wo
ve me, everything else has gone out of my hea
d then she clasped his arm with both her han
d they walked on forgetting everything, even th
ns. Oh, how different it was from the tender qui
ce with which she had accepted the minister's lo
at had been but a dream and this was life.

They went on together wandering along the be
ich was lit up by all the glories of the sunset. S
happy to think of anything; he absorbed in her.

"Oh, Horace, how different everything is!"
d. Her heart was full and spoke out of its abundan
f I could have thought this would ever come in th

weary days when I looked for you, and you stayed away from me——"

"But you forgot me, Isabel."

"Did I forget you? Oh, how I wearied for you, Horace!" There was something like guilt in the confession; but the meaning in her mind was different from his conception of it. The time in which she "wearied" for him had not been that pure, calm, cloistered year of her marriage, when all vain thoughts and wishes had been hushed in the unspeakable quiet. She had not thought of him then. She had been faithful and true as an angel to her father-husband, whose love surrounded her like a dwelling-place, and kept her pure from all the soils of earth. So detached was that period from her life that she did not even remember it while she spoke. It was a vision, a trance, a world apart. But in the other agitated world of her young lonely life it seemed now as if there had been but one thought, and that was him. "You left me all that year,—all that weary, weary year, after our Margaret was taken from me," she said, looking up at him with her tender, shining eyes; "and I thought I would break my heart."

"And at the end of it"—he said, "shall I remind you, Isabel, how you showed your love to me? or shall we let by-gones be by-gones, and speak of it no more?"

"How I showed my love for you?" said innocent Isabel;—innocent, heartless, ungrateful—and yet, in her heart, loyal, after their degrees, to all affections. She looked in his face with genuine surprise. And then, all at once, with a scorching blush remembered what he meant.

"He was so good to me," she murmured, wi
ncast looks; "oh, so kind, like my father! Wh
ld I do? It was different. Never, never, could
re been—like you."

Stapylton drew her to his side with a shudd
We'll speak of it no more," he said; "I could r
st myself, Isabel; one moment of my life I was
ll—and it was by seeing you——"

"Seeing me?" she said, aghast.

"With him—more lovely than I ever dreamt of
London—at the Opera. My God! when I think
' said the young man, with a blackness impenetral
her anxious gaze, coming over his face.

"Oh, Horace! was it you? Oh, was it you? Th
s something there that made me miserable. Oh, r
race!" she said, with pity, and remorse, and terr
nging to his arm.

"It was Hell!" he said, wiping his forehead, up
ich great drops of moisture were standing, "I h
en forgetting as best I could—till then. It w
ll; but this is Heaven," he added, after a pau
lding her closer. Isabel, terrified and appalled, clu
him, gazing, with her wistful eyes, into his fa
had grown very pale; she felt him even trem
h the poignant recollection. And all the feelings
rm, and perplexity, and dismay, which had ov
elmed her without apparent cause on that well-
mbered evening, rushed back upon her mind. P
race! what must it have been to him to see her th
arated from him, by another man's side. "Hel
said. But then why should he have tried to for
? What need was there? Was it not his own doin
bel checked the thought as it came into her mi

but still it had been there. This was one of the penalties for knowing so little of the man who was now all in all to her. For anything she could tell there might be valid reasons why he should not have sought her while she was still free. But he had not told her what they were. These thoughts pursued each other through her mind without any will of hers, following the pain of the recollections thus suddenly brought before her. "It is all past now," she said, clinging close to him, with her hands clasped on his arm.

"My darling! and this is Heaven!"

They are few who have not, one time or other, in their lives, suddenly woke with a start of dismay and pain to see opening between them, and those dearest to them, a gulf of the unknown, to which they have no clue. It may be innocent as the daylight; but yet the sense of isolation and hopeless ignorance to which the mystery of personal identity condemns us all, always causes a pang. Be it but a moment, be it a year, be it half a life-time—there you have lost your beloved and are no part of him, cannot follow or know—can but have poor report and history, superficial or half false as all history is. It is inevitable, but it is hard to submit to it. And Isabel, too, had her separate world, in which he had no part. Was it that he did not feel so hardly as she did this penalty of the second beginning? Was it that the man's faculties were less delicate, or the man's passion more overwhelming? But anyhow out of the paradise in which he thus rejoiced there suddenly gleamed upon Isabel something that looked like a personation of the flaming sword and expelling angel. It was sweet to her, very sweet, that he called it Heaven; but yet the sigh that

etrays the mortal Eden breathed, against her will,
f Isabel's heart.

But the days passed on, and were full of sweet
tapylton was very much in love with his wife.
ad won her after thinking he had lost her, and
ejoiced over her as it is the nature of man to re
ver any prize that has been hardly won.
resence and society made even the dulness and
f the place palatable to him. She was not an
allectual woman, who might have discovered his
f culture; and she, too, had been long separated
im, had thought him lost, and had found him a
nd merely to be with him, to feel his love encir
er all round, was for the moment blessedness en
or Isabel. Yet time and the hour, as it went
mpaired somewhat, as was natural, this primitive del
They began to discuss their plans together, to re
ach other of the world without, which they
hortly face.

One evening, a week later than the conversa
re have just recorded, it happened unfortunately
he cry of a child in one of the cottages awoke
eart of the young mother within her. Her mate
ad been slumbering, but was not weakened by
ence from her child. "If I had but my baby!"
ighed softly, half to herself, without thinking-
ndeed, she ought to have done—what an interru
uch an exclamation must have been to any y
an's love-dream.

He said something—she could not distinguish w
ut there was impatience in the tone, and it ja
pon her. He quickened his pace, too, out of
over's ramble, drawing her along with him. W

Isabel thought of it, she saw, with a new-born power of putting herself in his place, that it was cruel to bring in the baby at that moment; but at first it hurt her, and brought a little pang into her heart.

"Cannot you be content with me for a little?" he said; and then there was a pause, and they both turned, by instinct, to their lodgings. It was a winter night; but there are nooks along the coast where the soft west, even in Scotland, cheats the visitor into dreams which would better become the south. The sun was setting behind the Arran hills, lighting up all the horizon with a brilliant wintry glory. The tints were deeper, the gold more dazzling, than in summer; and far away stretched the sea, blue as steel, and brimming over with a rounded fulness, as if it could hold no more. The night air blew somewhat chill in their faces: perhaps it was that alone which made Isabel so cold and so willing to return.

"If we were to go away there," Stapylton said, pointing across the steel-blue glistening water, "it would be hard work exposing a baby to such a voyage. Could you make up your mind, Isabel, to leave her at home?"

"Leave—my child!" she cried, with a little shriek; and her joy all at once seemed to die suddenly out of her heart.

"I do not say so," said Stapylton; "I am only making a suggestion. At her age it would be hard upon her. You could not get milk for her, nor anything. Poor child! If you could trust her to any one at home——"

"Oh, Horace, ask me anything but that," said Isabel, clinging to his arm.

"Well, well," he said, subduing his impatienc
ier quickened senses could discern, by an effort
m not asking you to do it; I am only sugge
what might be for her good."

And then they went in, and a change came
he heavens and the earth to Isabel. It was not
e had changed: he was as anxious to be good to
o save her all annoyance, to make her happy, as
t was that a note, which jarred upon the perfect
iness she had begun to rise into, had been struc
t were, unawares. Had it come at the very begin
Isabel would not have been surprised. She had
ip her new life with the expectation that there
e thorns in it, and at first there had been no th
nd now, when all her doubts were lulled to rest
er hopes rising, and her heart full of gladness,
as this faint discord, inarticulate, inexpressible
nerest ghost of pain, which just showed itself i
perfect existence? She shut her ears and her ey
t, but it came back and back upon her. Her hus
as still her lover, still full of fond delight in her
ager to please her; but a meaning she could not
athom, a purpose which was not made clear to
eemed to be under his love and his fondness—
more, now less clearly visible from that day.
poke a great deal of America, pointing out a
dvantages to her; and Isabel, who had no dear fr
to leave behind her, and of whom her neighbou
disapproved, was not disinclined to think of emigr
But then there were the discomforts of the vo
upon which he insisted with ever-strengthening
of words.

"I would never hesitate if we were alone; bu

child necessitates a maid," he said, "and the maid brings other troubles in her train."

"But I want no maid; I can take care of my child without any help," cried Isabel.

"And if you did that how much should I see of you?" he said, with an almost sneer. "No, Isabel, I don't want to be disagreeable, but my wife must be my wife, and not a baby's nurse."

"She will soon be walking," said the young mother, trying with anxious wiles to recommend her child. "She would soon be—a help to me, Horace, instead of a trouble."

And he shook his head—that was all; but it was enough to plant unwelcome thorns in Isabel's pillow. While she was in her dream she had been free of anxiety about her baby. She had quenched any uneasy thoughts by the assurance so often repeated to herself, that Jean would be the safest and most careful of guardians; and that she was herself sufficiently near to be summoned at once should anything happen. But with such conversations going on day by day, the longing to see her child, to possess her once more, to return to common life and its duties, came back with greater force upon her. And she was afraid to say anything, to make any move which should increase her husband's impatience or turn his heart in any way against her child. Thus the unbelievable happiness of the beginning gradually grew clouded over. She became impatient above anything she could say of their lonely lodgings, the little village, the familiar walks which they took every day. The steamer which she sometimes went down to watch with Horace when it went or came, was to her a messenger of deliverance.

But she dared not say to him, "Let us go," much as attempt to draw him from the blessedn the honeymoon; she dared not even let him si that she herself had become a little tired of it such cases it is not for the woman to make the move. Thus the idyll, which had been at first so more perfect than one at least of the pair expecte came translated into a drama of secret struggl trial. When it rained, as on these coasts it d often, Stapylton had nothing to do but to hang her and talk, which, except in simple love-ma was not his forte. And love-making cannot endu ever. A man gets tired of it who has nothing to do; and a woman gets tired of it, especially she has graver thoughts to occupy her mind, an lived another life, which, after the first delirium not but come in and contrast itself with this. H not read even, which would have been a relief; h no work to do,—no amusement even to take him her side. They were thrown absolutely upon other, and Isabel could not even see an end t aimless leisure, nor was able to count the days weeks which must still part her from her child. had some work to occupy her own hands; if nc else, "fancy work," such as women can mana cover their idleness with, when nothing better is had. But Horace had not even fancy work. would talk to her of the time when they first m their early love-passages and meetings on the l but of the time of his absence he never said a and evaded all her attempts to lead him to it: how could she talk of that which slowly began emerge out of the mists, her own experience of

more satisfying and real than this? It was all associated with the minister, his rival and predecessor, whose name he could not bear to hear, nor any allusion to him. Thus the period most important to them both became a sealed book to each; and all they could speak to each other about was their boy-and-girl love-making, their earliest dawn of independent life.

"I wish you would tell me, Horace," she said one day, "about your own folk."

"I have no folk," he said, "except my wife."

"But that is nonsense. And now they are my folk as well as yours; and you have never said a word to me even about your mother. Horace, couldn't we go and see her? Would she be—dissatisfied—do you think—with me—for your wife?"

"I don't see that it matters much," he said, with a cloud on his face, "so long as I am satisfied. Isabel, don't speak any more about them; my mother does not care for me, and the rest think I am in America. I should have been in America now, but for your pretty face."

"My face? was that all?" said Isabel, with the fond inquiry of a new wife; and yet with something of a wounded sense that after all it was her face and nothing more.

"What should it be else?" he said, taking the face he spoke of between his caressing hands and kissing it; "but for that I should have been at the end of the world by this time; but for that——"

"Tell me, is there anything else you would have done?"

"There are things I would have left undone," he said, and, turning away from her, began to pace up and

own the room. Then he returned to her side and ook her in his arms. "If a man does a good many oolish things for the sake of such a sweet face, I sup- ose they will be forgiven him. I never thought you would turn out so lovely, Isabel!"

"Then if I had been ugly I should have been no- hing to you?" she said.

"Not much, probably; is that wonderful? But you are as pretty as ever you can be, and I don't repent. But we must go to America, darling; you would not have me settle here?"

"Wherever you think best, Horace," said Isabel, and she felt the moment of decision had come, and looked with an alarmed contraction of her forehead into his face.

"You would not grudge giving up the Loch, and all your friends," he added with a laugh; "if you can think they ever would be friends to *my* wife."

"I don't mind where I go," she said, terror stealing over her, "so long as I have my own with me. Wherever you and—baby are is home for me."

"Baby!" he muttered under his breath; and Isabel, who in her fright did not lose one change of his face, saw something steal over it which had not been there before—something of impatience, anger, fierce dislike, and yet self-restraint. He made a pause and an effort and banished the cloud; but yet she could see very well that an effort had to be made.

"You must consider it all well," he said; "it is not just our—your own pleasure that you must think of; you must remember what you owe to the child. She is too *young for a long* voyage, Isabel; probably she

might fall ill—and die. My dear, I don't want to frighten you—babies so often do."

"Oh, Horace, not with my care!" cried Isabel. "God would protect her by sea as well as by land. The poor women have all their little children with them. What should happen to my darling more than to the rest?"

"But it does happen to the half of the rest," he said, calmly. "I don't want to frighten you, Isabel; but afterwards, if anything were to happen, you would blame me for not telling you. And then if she lived and grew up she might object to be severed from all her friends and her own country. She has her friends, I suppose,—her—father's friends."

"She can have no friend so near as her mother," said Isabel, in a voice which was scarcely audible.

"What do you say? Of course you are her mother, my dear; but if she were to grow up to feel herself alone in a family, she—did not belong to, one may say—don't you think she would reflect upon you for taking her from her home? My darling! I did not mean to vex you; I am only saying what you will think yourself when you look at it calmly and see it in a reasonable light."

"Oh, Horace, Horace," cried Isabel, clasping her hands, "did not you say she should be as your own? You would not take your own child from its mother? You would not leave her behind?"

"Why should not I," he said, "if it would be for the child's good?"

For a moment she looked at him aghast, and then hid her face in her hands. He towered over her in superior virtue condemning her woman's weakness.

"If it were for the child's good. It is not our own pleasure we must think of." The sound of these sentiments bewildered Isabel. Was it possible that her eagerness to keep her baby at any cost or risk was but the selfishness of maternity? Could it be that he would actually be so self-denying as to leave even his own child behind him, if it was "for its good?" Isabel's heart protested against such virtue, and yet it silenced her indignant cry.

"I believe I have strength of mind enough to do it," he said, "if it was for the child's good. Drag her out there with you to undergo all the hardships of a long voyage, to be exposed to disease perhaps, to be parted from her own relations and the country in which her property lies. If she had been unprovided for the case might be different."

There was a shade of bitterness in his voice. Was he angry that little Margaret's fortune was safe and out of reach, though he himself had taken pains to make all the arrangements? Isabel withdrew her hands from her face, and gazed at him confused by his vehemence. What could it be that he meant?

"But she is very well provided for," he added, with meaning,—"quite a little heiress. And her friends would never be content that her property should go out of the country. I see a thousand difficulties in the way. And if I were you, I would choose the most careful guardian I could get for her, and leave her quietly at home, at least till she knows what is what, and can decide for herself."

"Oh, Horace, do you remember she is my child—my only child, that I love more than my life? If I *had to leave her I* would die!" cried Isabel; "but I

cannot leave my baby, it would be worse than leaving my life."

"Which shows you don't make much account of me," said Stapylton. And then he went out suddenly and left her, leaving all those suggestions to take form and germinate within her. She threw herself down on the sofa in the little lodging-house parlour, and hid her face in the cushions. It would be too much to investigate what her thoughts were at this dreadful moment. A storm raged within her moving heaven and earth. A hundred mocking spirits seemed to come round and gibe at her, and laugh at her vague, splendid anticipations. Was the joy over, and the consolation, along with the honeymoon? And were distress, and distrust, and a consuming terror, to enter in and take possession so soon?

CHAPTER XX.

When a honeymoon has been thus disturbed the idyll is over, and the only safe thing for the two human creatures who have thus played too long the dangerous drama of Love in Idleness is to get back with as little delay as possible to common life and work. Most frequently it is the woman who retards this salutary change of scene, hoping fondly that the idyll may come back, and fearing the ordinary routine which must separate to some extent the two existences. But Isabel was not in the innocent, primitive position which could render such a delusion possible. She had thought that this alone was life, and that all that went before was a dream; but every day, as it went on,

ade her more and more aware that the past wa
ream, that it could not be severed from her soul
nk into annihilation, however rapturous and vivid
esent might be. She sat at the window of her l
g and did her fancy work, and watched her
and's moods, and longed to be back. Oh, to be b
–if he were but a labouring man in a cottage g
t to his wholesome work, coming in to find ev
ing prepared for him, his wife and his house br
ith smiles at his approach—instead of the loung
e caressing, the vacancy, the fits of fondness
s of sullenness, and anxious watching of the cha
his face.

"Did not you once speak of a farm, Horace?"
id with a hesitation that was almost timidity, v
e had himself burst forth into an angry exclam
bout the dullness of the place.

"I hate this country," he said, with impatie
but if you have made up your mind you won't g
merica——."

"Indeed I never said so."

"No, of course you never did; but it comes t
me thing. And by the way, I bought som
meaton's stock," he said; "I thought I might ha
ait and kick my heels at your door, Isabel, lo
han you made me do. You were kinder than
ected. I thought I might have had to wait, and
had better be doing something. I had forgotte
bout that."

He thought he might have had to wait! The
a which he said it was not unkind, but there w
t that note of incipient scorn which a woman's e
o fine to catch. She had yielded sooner than h

pected. She had been an easy conquest after all his wrongs to her! The arrow went through and through Isabel's heart. Sudden shame and humiliation so penetrated her that all power of speech was gone for the moment. No wonder her friends, the country-side, all who knew her, should disapprove and look on her coldly—when even he——

"Was it a farm in our own parish you thought of?" she cried, faltering after a pause.

"I thought of offering for Smeaton's once," he said; "but that was on account of you. Now I have got you, it is a different matter; but hang it, Isabel, we can't go on like this, you know. A man is bored to death here. Will you make up your mind, like a brave girl, to come with me directly and get it over, or shall we go back to Kilcranion, or somewhere, and wait till spring? By that time you ought to have made up your mind."

"Horace," she said, still speaking very low, "to every thing but one thing I can make up my mind at once, and that one thing I can never do—never! Don't ask me. I cannot leave my baby behind."

"But, by Jove, if I insist upon it, you *must!*" he cried, with a certain bravado in his tone.

She got up and went to him with a glow as of hidden fire in her eyes. "I will not!" she said. "I will do anything—everything else you ask me, but not this!"

With her the crisis had reached the point of desperation. But as for Stapylton, he gazed at her for a moment, and, struck by her passion, turned round with a shrug of his shoulders, and what he meant to be an air of indifference. "For heaven's sake don't

make a fuss," he said. "I hate women who m
fuss—though I think you've always had rather a
that way, Isabel. Well, never mind. It is bet
wait for spring, anyhow. I'll run over to Kilcr
to-morrow, and engage one of the sea-bathing h
till April. They should be cheap enough."

"But, Horace," said Isabel, with parched
trembling lips, "you must understand—not ther
now, can I leave her behind me. It is but one
I will do whatever you wish,—whatever you tel
except this."

He stood eyeing her for a moment, as if u
tain how to deal with this obstinacy. Then he t
away with once more that careless shrug o
shoulders.

"Of course it is the only thing I do ask," he
"as is always the way with women. But never
May is better for a long voyage than December;
something may have happened by that time to cl
the circumstances—or you may have changed
mind."

"What could happen, Horace? and I will
change my mind."

"Well, well, say no more about it," he said,
we shall see when the time comes."

Thus he left her once more, with that sen
total disbelief on his part in her firmness, and ca
contempt of her resolution, with which parents
times drive their children frantic. He cared no
for the protestation, "I will not," which it cost h
much pain to make. She would change her min
something would happen. What could happen?
harm to Baby Margaret could have been in his thou

Isabel gave a cry as the idea crossed her mind; her heart fluttered into her throat. For five long weeks she had not seen her child; and had it indeed been her own voluntary deed which put little Margaret's fate in the hands of another? She was startled beyond measure by his assumed carelessness, his contemptuous putting aside of the question as a merely trifling matter, which required only due consideration on her part to show her the necessity of. Was it possible that she could ever come to this pitch—go with him, her old lover,—her new husband, who, whether he was the changed man she had once thought him, or, on the contrary, a soul infinitely less exalted, was nevertheless, in either case, hers to be held by all her life—and leave her child behind her? When a glimpse of this horrible possibility crossed Isabel's mind, it left her cold and trembling, as if all the blood had suddenly ebbed out of her veins. She had brought it all upon herself, as the people said. She was quite conscious of that, and conscious that her momentary triumph and satisfaction had left her, and that her whole life henceforward might be passed under the shadow of doubt and in a perpetual struggle. And he had breathed something like scorn upon her, too, in the faint, half-uttered, half-implied suggestion that she had accepted him too soon; yet, even *now*, she did not repent of what she had done. What could she have done else? She had foreseen it, even when she was free, and had taken the step which bound her all the same. And so she felt she would do again, did it remain for her to do.

Next day she was left alone to think over all this, and exaggerate all her difficulties in her own silent

mind, closed up from all possibility of help or sympathy. Stapylton went off to Kilcranion in the morning, to look, as he said, for a house. He did not ask her to go with him, but took it for granted that she should remain behind with her fancy work, and be ready to receive him when he arrived by the evening boat. When she had watched the morning boat depart which conveyed him away, and found herself alone standing on the shore in this strange place where she knew no one, Isabel felt herself seized upon by the strangest tumult of feeling. She was free. His back was turned who was dearest to her, and yet whom she had begun to fear. Oh, if she had wings like a dove to flee to her baby! She walked up and down the beach in the chilly winter morning, discussing all the possibilities with herself. It might be possible to take the next steamer, and get as far as Maryburgh, and then hire a boat and pay a stealthy visit to her child, and be back again before he should return. By good luck and careful management such a thing might be accomplished, and her heart beat high with the excitement of the chance. But then another consideration came in. Could she hide it from him? Could she thus openly set it before herself and him that he was no friend to little Margaret? Could she expose herself to all the comments of the Loch, by such a stealthy, sudden visit alone? Would it not increase still more his jealous dislike to her child? Would it not represent him to the world as already unkind to her,—already preventing her, except in this silent, stealthy way, from seeing her baby? She paced up and down, up and down the stony beach, while the village folk at a distance gazed out at her now and

then from their doors, and wondered vaguely why she should stay so long in the cold, in the morning, when most people have some occupation. It was known who she was, and she was not approved of at Ranza Bay more than at home. "The minister's wife at Loch Diarmid and her new man," was what she and her husband were called, and the villagers were not quite convinced that the relationship was perfectly reputable. "Light-headed thing, thinking mair of her own will than of her bonnie little bairn." "Prancing about yonder for the view, nae doubt; as if there was naething of mair consequence in this world than a view." "Instead of looking after her man's dinner, now she has gotten a new man."

Such were the comments made upon her. But Isabel was unconscious of them all. She watched the second steamer come into the pier with a struggle going on in her heart. Oh, to go to Margaret! It was her last chance of so employing this moment of freedom. She thought of the baby stretching out its little arms; of the cry of infant glee, the lighting up of the little countenance, and made a rush towards the steamer. And then she paused with the wind blowing cold in her face, and thought how she should meet Horace when he returned. She would be tired and hurried, and he would see it, or even if he did not notice it she could not have a secret from him, could not conceal her expedition as if it were anything to be ashamed of. "I—went to see my child,—as you were gone, Horace;" that was what she would have to say. And his face would cloud over, and he would say something which would go to her heart, and probably be more jealous than ever of her darling. With

a pang which could not be expressed in words, I
stood still and saw the boat, her last chance, go
No, she must not do it, for Baby Margaret's sake
watched the vessel wistfully as long as it was
seen, feeling as if her heart had gone with it t
child, and then turned listlessly away, and went
shut herself up in her little lodging-house parlour
went over in imagination, with speechless longing
tears, what she would have been doing had she
that day at the Glebe instead of here. How she
have gone and come unchidden with her baby i
arms; how its little smiles would have warmed
through and through; how she would have moved
room to room, gone out and come in, done her pl
work for Margaret, said here and there a pl
word to some kindly, homely passing friend,
watched the shadows on the hills, and the di
running over the Loch, and listened to the wind a
the trees, or the soft monotonous patter of the fa
rain. All these sights and sounds, and sweet oc
tions would have been hers, had she not married H
Stapylton. Good heavens! could it be that thi
the form her thoughts had unconsciously taken?
no, no! He was her lover, dearer to her than a
world. He was hers, and his heart would gro
to her, and all would be well. Yet—oh, that
new and old could but exist together! Oh, tha
could have and enjoy, both what was, and wha
been!

And surely, surely, there was no reason w
should not be so. A young mother's love fo
child—what was there in that to offend any hus
The most innocent—the most pure of all loves—

Isabel swore to herself would never make her more careless of Horace, never induce her to put him aside from his place as the first and chief. She would but love him better, be more devoted to him if her other natural tie was regarded. But he did not see it so. A yearning came over her such as she could not restrain. She cried aloud, as the sheep do on the hill, in mournfullest bleating, for the lost lambs. Oh, her baby! —her nursling, taken out of her bosom! not by God, which must be borne; but by a caprice—a mistake—the unkind will of a man.

"Will he no be in to his dinner?" said the landlady, coming with a sharp knock to the door, and disturbing all Isabel's thoughts.

"Not till the evening," said Isabel, hastily drying her eyes. "Mr. Stapylton is coming back by the last boat."

"But ye'll hae your dinner yoursel," said the woman. "Fasting's ill for a' body, especially for the like of you. Eh, but you've red een, Mrs. Stapylton! Him and you have had a little tiff afore he left."

"No, indeed—nothing of the sort," said Isabel, indignantly. "And I don't want anything, thank you. I shall not want anything till Mr. Stapylton comes back."

"I never heard of a couple yet but what had a tiff whiles," said the landlady, with philosophical calm; "especially when the man is about the house a' day, and naething to do. You're no to think too much o' 't. But dry your een, like a bonnie leddy, and gie him a smile when he comes hame."

"Indeed you are quite mistaken, I assure you,"

cried Isabel, half crying in her excitement, but trying to smile.

"I have seen an awfu' heap o' couples in my day," said the woman, shaking her head in the composure of superior penetration. "And the fonder they are of ilk ither, aye the more like to have a tiff; but you'll see it will a' be blown past if ye gie him ane o' your bonnie smiles when he comes hame."

If there is anything which can intensify the gloom of one of those tragic contentions which sometimes rend man and wife asunder, it is this gleam of kindly, consolatory ridicule from without, throwing over the deadly combat the *fausse air* of a lovers' quarrel. Poor Isabel could not cry after this interruption. How far had she floated beyond the light and pleasant time when a lovers' quarrel, with its fond offence and fonder reconciliation, was possible! She took up her worsted work, poor mortal rag into which she had woven so many painful fancies, and sat down by the window, and tried to make out for herself some plan of action. But her thoughts went away from her like so many deserters, some to follow Horace, and wonder what intentions might be in his mind in respect to the future, and what his feelings really were towards her child; some to haunt the well-known place in which the baby was, and imagine every little detail of its existence. The little rooms at the Glebe came before her like an island of calm in the stormy ocean upon which she had launched herself; should she ever recover that peace, or such peace as that—should she ever come to have any security in her life again? And then her mind, which was so running over with thought as to be *incapable of thinking*, suddenly turned and caught

at the poor landlady's homely bit of philosophy: "Dry your een, like a bonnie leddy, and gie him a smile when he comes hame." Yes, she would give him a smile; she would crush down every suspicion—every terror; she would take it for granted—absolutely for granted—that he meant all good and no evil. She would smile upon him, and ignore everything that was not love and kindness—and surely love would conquer in the end.

This she said to herself, with a pathetic smile, wiping away the moisture which would come to the corners of her eyes; and then went out anxious, abject, ready to put herself under his feet, to meet the lord and master whose yoke she had wilfully taken upon her. She took a walk first against the wind with the unconscious craft of weakness, until the colour was kindled in her cheek, and the light brightened in her eyes. He was more fond of her when she looked best. This strange, half-flattering, half-humiliating fact, Isabel had already found out. And she must use every weapon now for the struggle which was a matter of life and death.

The effort was rewarded. When she went to the boat, like any Odalisque, having done all she knew to heighten the effect of her simple beauty, she perceived by her husband's first glance that she had succeeded. He looked at her with a fondness which had begun to die out of his eyes. "What have you been doing to yourself?" he said; "you are looking quite lovely. You have not suffered much from my absence. It is nice, after all, to have such a little wife to come home to. Come, and I'll tell you all I've been about."

And they sauntered down, arm in arm, towards

their lodging, feeling, after all, as if it had been only a "tiff." Only a lovers' quarrel! was that all? and no harm in the heart of the fond young husband, nor fear in that of the wife?

Every word he said, every look he gave her, seemed to favour this blessed thought. He told her of the house he had taken, and described it to her, outside and in, with the details which women love, and how it was handy for the steamboats so that he could go and come and look after his "business" without leaving her alone too much. She was so grateful to him for every tender word, so thankful for this allusion to his business, which seemed to her to imply a settled life at home, that there suddenly came to Isabel all those soft arts of flattery and subjection which are to some men the chief charm of women. They had been somewhat wanting to her hitherto. In her past experience she had been the queen, sure to please, whatever she did, always right and always appreciated by simple divine right of being Isabel. And her love had wanted that touch of grace, that anxious endeavour to please, the unconscious cajolery which belongs to the love of a slave and inferior. Now out of her mortal terror she had caught this last grace which was agreeable in Stapylton's eyes. He felt it was the natural attitude of a wife. He liked to see her watch the motion of his lips, the look in his eyes, to have her elude every subject that was of a dangerous kind, and assent to whatever he said. Yes, he had subdued this proud creature; and being still, and in reality, very fond of her, Stapylton felt that he could now grant her attentions which he would have resisted had she claimed them as a right.

"*Shouldn't you* like to go to the old place?" he

said, "first? You can go if you like while I settle some other affairs. I'll take you to-morrow if you like, and bring a gig for you to take you to Kilcranion in the evening. Will that please you? You see I am not so bad as you thought."

"Oh, Horace, as if I ever thought you were bad; as if you ever were anything but good to me, and full of love and kindness!" said Isabel, like a slave, trembling and glowing with happiness and with tears in her eyes.

"You may be sure that is what I always mean," he said, in his lordly, condescending way; "and now you know how to make me do anything you like. Look as lovely as you are looking now and be sweet to me, and you can't think how much I'll do to please you, my pretty darling!" He looked down upon her with such glowing eyes that Isabel was confused with the sudden revulsion. Could she doubt him after this? She clasped her hands on his arm and lifted her face to his, full of beseeching, flattering, appealing tenderness. If that was how to win him, then it should be that way; and if there was a little vague pang of she knew not what mingled with the sweetness, why then it must be herself who was to blame? Thus the transition from the old minister's princess to the young husband's "pretty darling" was made in a confusing, bewildering sort of way. Una changed into Scheherazade or Zuleika all at once, without any preparation, no doubt would have felt the change bewildering. And so did Isabel. But he was very tender to her and full of caressing fondness, and she was to be taken to her baby to-morrow. Was not that happiness enough to obliterate all lesser evils?

CHAPTER XXI.

THE morning came so much wished for, in a
of wintry sunshine befitting such a joyful day.
cranion was a village on the other side of the
from Loch Diarmid, which lived upon the su
visitors to "the saut-water," and shut up its hous
the winter through, so that Stapylton had been
as an angel of light, when he offered to take
them, and had every difficulty smoothed out
way. He was to go there when he had taken
to the Glebe, and complete the necessary arrange
about the house, and would come for her, he sai
the evening to take her home. When Isabel firs
the brightness of the morning she had given ven
burst of happiness at the prospect of going hom
seeing her baby, first frank utterance of her th
which had momentarily escaped the burden of th
vious day's experience. But when she looked
husband for sympathy she perceived a certain
over his face; and all her discoveries,—her experi
—her painfully acquired knowledge, had rushed
upon her in a moment. This was not how to pr
frank utterance and frank response were delights
past. She had her part to play, and must not
it. Such was the vague consciousness that thrust
into her thoughts. She loved him, and you will
could be no such hard part to play, to watch the
cations of her husband's face, to have the air of f
ing only where he led, and accepting from his ki
every good thing that came in her way. Eve
visit to her child had been put out of its natural

as an inevitable fact, and must bear the aspect of a special manifestation of his tenderness. You may say it could be no such very hard task; but yet it was hard because it was unnatural, and because Isabel felt the unreality there was in those expressions of her gratitude to him, which she forced herself to clothe in double warmth of language. She felt herself false when she turned her simple exclamation of delight at the beauty of the day, and the pleasure of going home, into thanks to him for taking her. The latter expression was that which pleased him best. He liked it to appear that everything came from his grace and pleasure; that he was to give her everything as to a child or a servant. He disliked to hear of her own will at all, except in the guise of wishes which he could satisfy, earning sweet thanks and flattering praise. There are many men who are of the same way of thinking, and many women honestly able to content them. But Isabel's training was against her. To change her simple resolution to do, into a helpless desire to have something done for her; and to convert her simple satisfaction in an event which would increase her happiness into thanks to him who had permitted that event to come about, was contrary to all her instincts. Her sense of justice was wounded, her faith cruelly mortified. She felt herself a traitor making those grateful speeches, which in point of fact she could not feel. But she had an awful game at stake, and could not shrink from the conditions of the struggle. Better even to be false with the honeyed words that pleased him, so far as her faltering lips would go, than to stand upon her own rights and feel that he hated her child. She gave herself another lesson in sophistry as, with a heart

heavier than at her awakening, she put on one of her pretty marriage dresses, and prepared for her journey. If he had not wanted those thanks, almost insisted on them, how much more grateful she would have been! If he had let her take her own natural way, what genuine praise, what ever-increasing adoration she would have given him in return! But he did not divine that. What he exacted was that she should have no rights, no independence of action, but should flatter him into granting all her desires, and flatter him for granting them, making herself sweet for his eyes, and submissive for his pleasure, looking up to him with anxious desire to please him, with wistful waiting upon his looks, as a slave to a Sultan. With a certain despair, yet steadfastness, Isabel saw and accepted the position. Not Una as of old,—not a princess to be worshipped, more like a harem wife dependent altogether on her master's approval, and fooling him to the top of his bent to gain her ignoble will. Was this what she was reduced to? And yet with her heart torn in twain, loving him, loving her child, she accepted the *rôle*, and tried as best she might to play it out.

Her heart beat so loudly when once more the steamer carried her up Loch Diarmid, that the very power of speech seemed to forsake her. This time there was no kind, homely face looking out from the pier to welcome her. No one knew she was coming. The village folk gave her a gruff "good-day" as she passed, with a look towards her husband, half of scorn, half of disgust. There was no sign of life in the windows of the House, as they passed Lochhead together. People on the road stared at her, and then turned *round and stared again*, disapproving of her, unfriendly

to him. Isabel had known it all, and believed that she had accepted it, half in scorn, half in resignation; but she felt the difference when it was thus brought before her. And Stapylton's face had clouded over the moment they set foot on the shores of Loch Diarmid. A sullen shadow came over him. He walked with his eyes cast down, saying little to her, taking no notice of anything around.

"I hate the place!" he said, with angry energy, "if you had taken my feelings into consideration you would never have asked me to come back."

"Oh, Horace!" cried poor Isabel, faltering, "let me get my baby, and let us go wherever you like! I will never more ask you to come back."

"Always that baby!" he said, with something that sounded like an oath; and thus all the flutter of joy was stilled in her heart as they went up the hill.

But when she entered the familiar house, and, rushing in all eager and breathless, found herself by the side of the homely cradle in which little Margaret was sleeping, the young mother's heart felt ready to burst with delight and misery. She fell softly on her knees beside it, and worshipped. Soft tears gushed to her eyes, a soft transport filled her. "Oh, my baby, my darling!" she cried, putting down her head upon the little coverlet, with other inarticulate cries, like the cooings of a dove. When she recollected herself, and looked up with a sudden pang of terror, she caught her husband's eye bent upon her with that look of incredulity which goes to a woman's heart. He thought it was a piece of acting for his benefit. He did not believe in the reality of any such overflowing of the heart over an unresponsive child. He would have

been, indeed, more offended had he thought it real, than he was by the supposed simulation. The one would have proved his wife to be capable of loving something else as well as she did himself; the other was but the homage of weakness to power. "You think you can take me in with all this," he said, with a laugh. "It is very good acting, Isabel; but I know better than that."

"Acting?" she said, rising slowly to her feet, with wonder so great that it almost overwhelmed the pain.

"Yes," he said, taking her into his arms. "Do you think I don't know that not for all the babies in the world would you risk parting with me?"

She gave a little cry, which he did not understand; and all the sages in the world could not have explained to Horace Stapylton the nature of those tears which his wife shed on his shoulder, with her face buried in her hands; the anguish—the despair of ever understanding, he her, or she him; the sudden fiery indignation, the bitter disappointment, the struggle of love with love, and blame and pity. Oh, that he whom she loved could feel so! Oh, that he could be so little, so——, and then she stopped herself even in her thoughts, and moaned aloud.

"Well, well," he said, superior and compassionate, "don't take it so much to heart, if I've found you out. I'll go now, and at four o'clock I'll come back for you; but mind you are ready, for I don't want to be driving about the country in a moonless night."

When he went away, Isabel felt that she drew a long breath of relief. She was glad, and yet how miserable it was to feel herself glad! She dropped wearily into a chair, and sat and gazed upon her sleep-

ing child. The dimpled, rosy creature lay among its pillows, flushed with sleep, with its little arms thrown over its head in baby grace. So helpless, so soft, so sweet a thing, appealing to every human eye by its very weakness and dependence, by the perfection of its rosebud beauty, by every natural plea that could be addressed to the heart; was it possible that any one could resist it? any one, the hardest even, or the most cruel—not to say him to whom its mother had given her heart and her life? The light swam in Isabel's eyes as she sat and gazed at her child. The very room surrounded her with silent looks of reproach, with heart-breaking appeals to her recollection. There stood the old-fashioned sofa, on which Margaret had died; there hung the pretty bookshelves, the pictures the minister had hung with his own hands to please her; and there was his child sleeping in her innocence, with her mother sitting by like a visitor come to see her for an hour, not knowing whether she so much as dared to call her, her own. This was the one awful penalty of her second marriage, which Isabel had not foreseen. She had expected all the disapproval, and even the revulsion of feeling in her own mind; she had expected sadly to find her husband no perfect being; but she had not looked for this. That a thought of separating her from her child should occur to any human mind had never once entered into her thoughts. She was thus seated in a kind of stupor, gazing upon her sleeping infant with eyes blinded with tears, when Jean came into the room. Jean had been mollified, in spite of herself, by the care her stepdaughter had taken to provide for her. Even such a benefit could not purchase her approval

of the marriage; but that and Isabel's absence, and a certain something in her eye, which did not speak of perfect satisfaction in her new lot, had touched Jean's kindly heart.

"Isna she a picture?" she cried, placing herself behind Isabel with uplifted hands of worship; "and as thriving and as firm as heart could desire. Eh, Isabel! I thought she would have broken her bit heart the day you went away. There would be aye a look at the door, and stretching out her arms to every one that came nigh, and aye another wail when the poor infant was disappointed. I got an awfu' fear that it might bring on something—but sin syne she's been as good and as bonnie as you see her now."

"My little darling!" was all the young mother could say.

"Hoots, dinna greet: it's meeting and no parting now," said Jean, with a keen look of inspection. And then there was a pause. Isabel had not the heart to move nor to speak, nor even to take her child into her arms.

"If it had been me I would have had her afore now! Hoots, never mind waking her; whisht, my bonnie lamb! Your little bed's saft, but no so saft as your ain mother's bosom. There she is to ye," said Jean, putting the rosy, half-awakened child into her mother's arms. The good woman stood and gazed at the group with a cordial, kindly pleasure. "Poor lass! poor bairn!" she said to herself as she watched the mother's passion of kisses and tears and unintelligible words: vague suspicions were creeping about Jean's mind. This close strain of passion, those tears which did not dry up as they ought to have done,

or give place to smiles, filled her with alarm—an alarm, it must be confessed, not unmixed with satisfaction, for had not she, in common with all the country-side, declared that of such a marriage no good could come?

"Mr. Stapylton, he's away to Kilcranion?—ye're to bide there, I hear? but what for could you no come hame, Isabel, to your own house?"

"It is your house now," said Isabel, with an attempt at a smile.

"Na, na, only the life-rent," said Jean, "of my ain end; and I'm awfu' thankfu' to have that. Am I one to come ben to the parlour and set up for a leddy? No, my bonnie woman, it's hers and yours a' the days of my life, as well as when I'm dead and gone. Him and you might have been as comfortable here as in Johnny Gibb's house at Kilcranion. There's nae accounting for tastes—but sure am I there's no a room in it equal to the new parlour here in the Glebe."

"It is only for a short time—a month or two," said Isabel.

"And where are you going then, if ane might ask?"

"We were talking of going to America," said Isabel, under her breath. The child had relapsed into sleep again with its head nestled against her breast. Your baby asleep on your knee, its rose cheek pillowed on you, its little hand clasping your finger, its whole sweet helpless being embraced in your encircling arms—after you have been parted for weeks from sight or hearing of it—can there be anything more sweet? Isabel bent down her head over little Margaret, and

in her heart said softly to her God in a transport of sweetness and anguish that was insupportable, "Now let me die." To go a step further would be to plunge into darkness, and chaos, and night.

"To America!" said Jean. "Eh, Isabel! that's an awfu' change to think of—and the bairn?—"

"What of the bairn?" cried Isabel in a sudden wild panic of terror; and gathering up her child's rosy, dimpled limbs in her arms, she rose and confronted her stepmother as if there could be any meaning or power in Jean's unconsidered words.

"Na, Isabel, I'm meaning nothing," said Jean, falling back in dismay; the sharp misery of the young mother's tone, her desperate attitude, the sudden mastery of her excitement over all her motherly care not to disturb the baby, came like a revelation to her stepmother; with a woman's wit she seized upon the sudden pang which had come to herself, to comfort with that, the unknown and deeper misery which thus erected itself before her without a moment's warning. "It's just that my heart will break to part with the darling," she cried, putting her apron to her eyes.

And then Isabel calmed down and took her seat again, and shed a few silent tears, trembling meanwhile with excitement, and the secret something which Jean could see was "on her mind" but could not divine. She made no complaint, however, and no disclosure, but quieted herself with a power of self-command which the homely but close observer standing by perceived to be new developed in her. When she spoke again it was about little Margaret's "things," that they might be packed up and ready when the gig came for them at four o'clock.

"Will ye take her away with ye?" said Jean; "it's awfu' sudden; will ye take her this very night?"

"Do you think I would give my darling up again?" cried Isabel, with her cheek pressed against the child's cheek.

"If you're sure it's for the best," said Jean, whose mind was really disturbed and anxious for her step-daughter. "Isabel, my bonnie woman, I'm meaning no slight to him; but men are queer creatures. They're no fond whiles of a little bairn that takes up the mother's time, even when it's their ain bairn; and she'll no go to strangers. And ye canna have her with you at night as ye used to have her. My dear, if I was you I would take time to think."

"I will never part with my baby again!" said Isabel. In the quietness her old nature seemed to come back to her. The spell of Stapylton's presence began to lose its fascinations. She began again to feel that it was still lawful for her to judge and decide for herself.

"But if it was to make any—dispeace. I'm meaning no offence. She's well and safe, and ye can trust her with me. My bonnie woman! you must not do that in haste that you'll repent o' before the day's done."

"How should I repent of it?" she said, hastily, but would not yield. She had made up her mind entirely how it was to be done. She would say not a word to her husband, but take it for granted as a thing inevitable. Even, if she saw that to be expedient, she would cover up her baby under her cloak, until the *trajet* was accomplished. In one way or other, howsoever she might be baffled, she had determined

to take the child with her. All that Jean, v
the practical difficulties better than she did, co
ceed in settling was that Jenny Spence's eldest d
at present "out of a place," whom little M
knew, should go with her to Kilcranion, to t
of her, and relieve the young mother from
attention to the child. Jean sent off her
stantly to warn Nelly Spence that she mus
ready. "If she goes by the afternoon boat, s
at the house as soon as you," said Jean; an
that was fairly accomplished, it was, as she
weight off her mind.

Meanwhile, Isabel, sat sunk in a quiet wh
almost stupor; the past days had been very
days. And now the stillness and the soft slee
child, and the embracing of the old kindl
which seemed to stretch its arms round her
forgiving calm, and Jean's kindly accustome
trations lulled her very soul within her. T
things she had lost came back and floated ro
bringing something of their own peace into h
and all that was disturbing and novel had
away for a moment like a dream. She felt a
could have slept like the baby.

"Sleep, my darling, if ye can," said Jea
passionately, "you've been doing more than y
able—it's the cold air, and then the fire——"

"No, no," said Isabel, rousing up. "In
that, if you will pack up her things, I'll ta
Margaret out for a walk, while the sun is so
the braes."

"Weel, weel," said Jean, "ye'll come to
there *now*." *Not now, all* the harm was over

"And that she's no happy is written in her face," Jean continued, as she watched her straying out into the sunshine, with a spark of natural wonder that she should take that way of spending the short day. But she was mollified when she saw that Isabel crossed the road to the spot on the hill where it had been Margaret's custom to pray. "And she'll maybe get good there, poor thing, so ill as she has done for herself," the sympathetic woman said to herself, looking out from the door. She had watched wilful Isabel so often taking her wayward course from that door; sometimes to meet her "lad," as in the old times upon the braes; sometimes demure and stately to join Miss Catherine in some long longed-for pleasure; then leaning on her husband's arm, the serene minister's wife; then mournful in her widow's weeds. "I understood a' but this," Jean said, meditatively, to herself. "But that she's no happy is written in her face."

The child was now awake, smiling upon her, after the first momentary blank of forgetfulness, and had made her heart leap by saying, or stammering, "Mamma," the accomplishment which all this time Jean had been labouring to teach her. Little Margaret danced and babbled in her mother's arms, and stretched out her hands to the running burn and to the bare branches of the other Margaret's rowan-tree, when Isabel paused beneath it. She had meant to bring her great trouble out with her there, and to ask God's counsel, when she left the cottage; but the baby's mirth beguiled the poor young mother. She sat down on the grassy seat, and forgot everything, and played with her child. What good would thinking do her? What good (she had almost said, and stopped herself

with a pang of reproach) would prayer do h
if she could but pray! and then, in her agitat
caught at the momentary delight that was ne
her, and played with her baby, and on the edg
precipice forgot her terror. Then, as softer ar
thoughts gained her mind, Isabel rose up aga
half stealthily, went past her own door and
hill-side to the spot where she had so often
lover under the little birch-tree. The grass
heather were heavy with wintry moisture, but
unaware of it. And again her head grew gid
everything looked to her like a dream. Was it
ton's wife who was standing there under t
where he had been so fond and so cruel? W
his child in her arms? Was her life one ar
visible, or a thing of shreds and patches, bro
fragments? She stood and grew giddy with the
looking over the wintry braes, while little M
caught at the drooping branches of the birc
laughed at the shower of dewy spray whi
scattered over her. Her baby laugh seemed
mother to wake echoes all over earth and h
echoes that reached the churchyard, where *th*
lying who would have defended the child—whic
reach the child's enemy on the road miles aw
put evil thoughts in his mind against the i
unconscious creature. And her child's enemy
own lover and husband—could such a misery

She was standing thus as in a dream, when
in her ear made her start, and spring aside i
terror. She could not have told what she wa
of. Something—anything—ghosts in the d
and what she *saw was not* unlike a ghost.

Ailie in her white dress, with a shawl over her head —Ailie, who had fallen as entirely out of Isabel's self-absorbed musings as if she had never been.

"What are you doing here, Isabel Diarmid?" she said, "your courting's past, and you're married to another man. You have chosen this world, and you're satisfied. What are you doing here?"

"Oh, Ailie! you frightened me," said Isabel, holding her child fast in her arms.

"Many a time I frighten mysel," said Ailie, "I come and go, and I carena where. I am seeking the Lord and I canna find Him. Something says in my heart Lo here and Lo there—but there's nae sound of His coming, though I'm aye listening night and day."

"And are you no better?" said Isabel, in her bewilderment; "and is there no word of Mr. John?"

"Oh, ay, Mrs. Lothian, she's better," said old Janet Macfarlane, coming forward nimbly from among the heather. The old woman was worn with anxiety and excitement, but kept her undaunted courage. "I beg your pardon, I canna mind your new name; they're awfu' fashious thae English names. Mrs. Diarmid's a hantle better, since the letters came from Ardnamore. He's in Paris, he's among his grand friends. I canna understand what it's a' about myself, but he says it'll be in the papers if he shouldna hae time to write; and if your goodman should get an English paper, maybe you would let us hear. She's real weel, and taking her walks, her and me, like the auld times," said Ailie's champion. She met Isabel's eye steadily, as she told this lie of pride and love. Ailie for her part took no notice. She was standing by Isabel's side, looking with wistful eyes on the wild landscape, and

seeing nothing; a creature distraught, and torn
all the common woes and rules of life—but n
though even her mother thought so,—at least

"I was never ill," she said softly, "I w
one thing, Isabel, but that I canna get. I w
as well as you, and as light-footed, and as r
do whatever there was to do,—if I had but lig
the Lord."

"Has it never come back?" said Isabel, w
not knowing what to say.

"Whiles I think it will never come back
Ailie, shaking her head, "and whiles there is a
of hope. My mother's aye at my side night a
and if she is that kind, would He break His
Isabel, it's an awfu'—awfu' trial! What a
trials to that? To be disappointed in your Go
if *she* is that kind, would He break His word?
was a mother myself. But if you were tempt
a' this world could bestow, would you give
little bairn?"

A cry burst out of Isabel's heart. She clas
child closer, and sprang apart from the strange qu

"Oh, no never,—never! not if I should die.

"And you're but a young thing, and she's
old worldly woman," said Ailie, with solem
"and would He break His word that's above a

Isabel's heart, which had been momentari
beat so loudly at this unthought-of anticipation
inmost struggle that she could not speak, b
gaze with awe and troubled wonder, while Aili
away as she came without another word. She
along among the heather, threading her way by
a strange, ghostly white figure, with her mot

a shadow beside her. Thus the shuttle which wove out one of those lives, shot across the other once again, making a mystic connexion between them. Isabel went home, hushed and silent, after this strange encounter. The wonder of it overpowered her, and silenced her own thoughts.

"You have told me nothing about Ailie," she said, when she was once more seated in the little parlour before the cheerful fire.

"She's taken to wandering far and near," said Jean, "aye, in her white gown. Some say she's clean daft, poor lass; but I canna think it's as bad as that. She's awfu' good to the poor folk, and whiles will stop and say a word—if you'll believe me, Isabel—mair like our Margret's words and mair comforting and reasonable than when she spoke in *the power*."

"But her heart is broken," said Isabel, with a sigh, which came from the depths of her own.

"And there's something, they say down by, in this week's paper about Mr. John. But you'll hear better than me. Some awfu' business there's been in France about killing the king. They say he's one of thae revolutionaries. But I havena seen the paper myself," said Jean. "I'm thinking I hear the wheels of the gig coming up the brae."

Isabel gave a hurried glance up in her face, and another at her child. A glance not of suggestion, but of speechless, bewildered appeal.

"Go out and meet your man, my bonnie woman," her stepmother added hurriedly, "and give me the bairn."

Not another word was said between them on the subject. There was no confidence made, no counsel

asked. But Isabel understood that her stepmot
vaguely, yet truly, what was in her heart. The
afternoon was growing dark; the stars were
half visible in the frosty sky.

"Make haste, for it is getting late!" S
shouted from the door. Isabel put on her own
dress with trembling hands, while Jean dres
child. Then she took little Margaret into h
under her cloak. Her face was deadly pale wit
ment, and resolution, and terror. She put
white lips to her stepmother to kiss her, thou
salutations were rare between them,—and th
out firmly with her precious hidden burden,—h
bounding wildly against her breast.

"Make haste, Isabel!" her husband shout
the gig. He did not get down to help her
having already begun to glide out of the hal
lover. And, after an awful moment of fear, sh
herself seated by his side, without remark on
The baby moved and struggled under the clo
Stapylton took no notice. "What are you pu
now to delay us?" he cried to Jean, who was
the child's little basket of "things" behind.
full of impatience to be off, and thought of
else for the moment. "It will be quite dark
we get home," he said, with almost a scowl
delay.

Jean stood and gazed after them as they
from the door. "Oh, canny, canny, down th
she cried. She had not shed a tear over the
but her heart was heavy and sore. "She'll
but once, and that will be a' her life," she said
self, as the black *speck* disappeared over the

it's begun already. I aye said it, if that were ony satisfaction; but she never would listen to me."

CHAPTER XXII.

THERE was no moon, and the night grew speedily dark; and the road was no smooth, level highway, but a road up hill and down dale, as was natural to the country. Stapylton was so absorbed with its difficulties that he took no notice of the little traveller whose presence could not long be concealed.

"What is it?" he said, when little Margaret with a struggle made herself visible from under the cloak.

"It is only the child," Isabel answered in the easiest tone she could attain to, though her very lips were trembling with excitement, and resolution, and alarm. What he said was lost in the night breeze which swept past them as they flew on against it. She thought he too had taken little Margaret's presence for granted, and her heart seemed to go back with a leap to its natural place in her breast. But the fact was that Stapylton's mind was at the moment too much occupied to have time to think of the child. When she looked up at him again, she saw that his brow was contracted, his lips firmly set together, a look of oppression and almost terror in his face.

"This confounded country of yours!" he said, "it is bad enough in daylight, but it's horrible in the dark. Why did you keep me waiting so long at that infernal cottage-door?" But he did not seem to notice the answer Isabel made in her dismay. And they swept along through the dark with nothing visible but the

pale stars in the sky, and the great shadows
hills, and glimmer of the larger loch on the othe
of the braes to which they were descending; an
thing audible but the sharp din of the horse's ho
the road, and Baby Margaret's little murmurs
nestled to her mother's side. The curious oppr
in Stapylton's face made Isabel, too, hold her b
though otherwise she would have felt no alarm
the well-known way. But past agitation had un
her, and the thought of the struggle to come. "
you give up your little bairn?" Ailie's words
still ringing in her ears, and she kept repeating t
self over and over, "Never, oh, never, if I should
While this was going through her mind, Isabel,
by her husband's side, trembled with the qu
What would he think if he knew her thoughts?
might he be thinking even now, so close to he
she could not move without touching him, so
that her profoundest skill could not fathom wha
in his mind?

It was thus that they reached the first place
in their new-married life they could call home.
a relief which an hour before she could not ha
lieved possible, Isabel placed her baby in the
of Nelly Spence, who was waiting for them
door.

"You'll take great care of her," she said, wi
ing, as she put the child into her arms.

"Eh, ay, I'll take awfu' care of her," wa
answer.

And the young mother was glad to be thus rel
to go to her husband, and do her best to conciliat
please him. The child by itself and the husb

himself, she would have given her life twenty times over for either—but together the conflicting claims tore her asunder. Suddenly as the lightning gleams through a storm it occurred to Isabel that there would be a certain frightful advantage and ease to herself could she be capable of doing as her husband said. No, it was no thought of hers; it was a devilish arrow shot into her mind like those that in the awful valley were thrust into the mind of the pilgrim, blasphemies presented to him as if they were thoughts of his own. But that brief moment since she had regained her child into her own possession had taught Isabel more of the practical difficulties of her position than years of thinking could have done: her heart was still palpitating with the joy of seeing her baby again, and being allowed without remonstrance to bring it away; and yet she was glad to leave little Margaret in kindly hands, and to feel herself free to go to her husband. But for Jean's kindly forethought what could she have done? She would have been obliged to take the baby with her, a constant interruption, and to make it positively obnoxious to the man upon whom everything depended. A hot flush came over her when she thought of the danger escaped. And she had been unconscious of it until this very hour.

The fire was burning brightly in the little bare dining-room, and the table spread; and Horace, still with cloudy looks, sat in a great armchair thrust back into the shadow. It was not home, but yet it was more like home than the honeymoon lodgings. It was, at least, their own house. She had come to him giving up her baby, feeling that such a sacrifice was his due; and, perhaps, she expected that some special word or

look of tenderness should reward her. But it w
evident that his mood was very far from lo
He burst out when she came up to the fire a
with her face turned towards him in the full
the firelight. Her agitation had roused all the
expression in Isabel's face. Her eyes looked
and were full of light and shadow. A tremulou
went and came on her cheek. Her mouth
trembling and eloquent with suppressed feelin
the glimmering of the firelight gave a certain
of effect to the whole. He did not even look a
first, but suddenly burst out:—

"I hate this country of yours! I always
it! I don't know what made me such an as
consent to stay. By Jove! I wonder if any
was ever worth——"

"What, Horace?" she said, trying to laugh

"The things we do for them," he said. "
a kind of demons with your pretty faces. Yo
us to do a thousand things that if we had
about us——"

"Horace, we have surely something more tha
faces? Is that all you care for?" said Isabel.

"Well, never mind," he said, coarsely;
were plain, you would not ask such a question
you had been plain, Isabel, you should neve
been my wife."

He expected her to be pleased with the rou
pliment: and, pleased himself, roused up a littl
the shadow, and suffered his face to relax and
at her as at a picture. "No," he said, "you
never have been my wife. I never thought, eve
I admired *you most in* the old times, that y

have turned out so handsome, Isabel; and when I look at you I don't mind——"

"What is it you don't mind?"

"All you have cost me," he said, falling back into the shadow. "By heaven that night at the Opera, when I saw you dazzling,—you whom I had been persuading myself to believe was only a pretty country girl. And there you were like a queen of beauty. I shall never forget how I felt that night."

"Oh, don't speak of it!" she cried. "I cannot bear it; don't remind me of that."

"If I could bear it, you may," he said, with a certain tone of contempt; "but I don't mind, you are worth it all, my dear; and now let us have some dinner. I have got you in spite of everything, and at least we may be jolly to-night."

So they sat down to their dinner, which Stapylton himself had taken the trouble to order; and not a word was said about the child. He had accepted it as a natural part of their household, she thought; and Isabel's heart grew a little lighter with every word he spoke. He had forgotten, no doubt, all that had been said in a different mood; and she began to flatter herself it had been but a passing moment of ill-temper; and that now the child was under his roof, there would be no further comment upon it. A feverish gaiety took possession of her as she caught at this thought. She made a conscious effort to amuse him, stirring up all her dormant powers. She told him of her meeting with Ailie, and did not wince at his rude comments upon the woman he had no understanding of. She was so anxious to please him that she could have borne anything he chose to say. She was lowering to his

level, though she did not know it; a certain pleasure in the fact of being able to make him laugh, and turn his thoughts from more serious matters, took possession of her. Oh, if she could only have gone on telling him stories like Scherazade, and occupying him with any romance or trifle till they had embarked on their voyage, and little Margaret under her shawl had been conveyed into the ship unnoticed! It was the first piece of practical falsehood she had ever attempted, and it had been successful beyond her hopes; and in the haste and agitation of the moment it seemed to her that this was the soundest policy, and that there was no other course before her to pursue.

"That woman was always mad," said Stapylton, "I could see it from the first; but, by Jove! she must be cunning, too. To get that mad fellow to marry her and make a lady of her, as they say, was the cleverest thing I know. What a fool he must have been, to be sure!"

"Oh, Horace! you don't understand Ailie," said Isabel.

"I understand her a great deal better than you do, my dear; though I believe in your heart, if you were to tell the truth, *you* saw what she was at all along. Depend upon it, there is always some meaning in those got-up things. When I remember how you were all taken in, and expected your sister to get better too—when anybody with half an eye could see she was going as fast as she could go."

"Oh, Horace! don't speak of that," cried Isabel. "They say there is something in the papers about Mr. John—something that has happened in France. There

is the newspaper lying with your letters, will you open it and see?"

"Time enough for that," he said, drawing his chair to the fire. "By Jove! he must have been a fool—a bigger fool than even I am, to come down here and bury myself in this hole, all for the sake of you! You ought to be a good wife to me, Isabel, instead of setting up your silly little notions. You never were as happy in all your life before, *I* know. You never had any one to pet you before, and make a little idol of you. And yet you go and vex me and spoil all our plans for some foolish notion about a baby, that cares as much for the first country lass that makes a fuss over it as it does for you. Yes, it is a true bill, my darling. You know what a naughty little rebel you are. Now acknowledge that in all your life you never were so happy before?"

It would be safe to say that at this moment, with her husband's arm round her, and his eyes glowing upon her with admiration and fondness, Isabel had scarcely ever been more unhappy, more torn by painful struggles. "Oh, Horace!" she cried, faintly, hiding her face in her hand. The question humiliated her. She was ashamed, mortified, offended; and at the same time stung to the heart by the contrast between the state of her feelings and his opinion of them. Happy! was there any meaning in the word? But, fortunately, no thought of this crossed Stapylton's mind. He was full of the comfort of his dinner and his rest, and the indigenous toddy which steamed by his elbow. Ease and that genial influence had mollified him, and made him complacent. He took Isabel's confusion for the evidence of a shy rapture.

"You were always a shy little fool," he said, kissing her; "but I know you were never so happy before. Trust me to know it. You have never told me the secrets of your prison-house, but I can guess them. By Jove! you should be grateful to a man when you find yourself delivered out of that tomb, and brought safe off here, to be made a pet of. It's all very well to pretend, and to make up a pretty little scene, like that you treated me to this morning; but *I* know you can't care for that brat of a baby, nor put it in comparison with me."

"Oh, Horace, let me love my child!" cried Isabel. "I will love you all the better—don't take my little one from me! I will serve you on my knees—I will study your every look, if you will but consent that I should love my own child."

"And what should you do if I did not consent?" he said, with a smile. "You would cry very prettily, Isabel, I know, and make a scene as all women do, but you'd give in at the end. Now, why not give in at the beginning, and save yourself all the trouble? Do you think there is any doubt, my love, who would conquer at the last?"

"Yes," she said, in a voice scarcely audible, trying to free herself from his arms. "There is a doubt—for I might die."

"What has your dying to do with it? No, my love. You'll give in to me and do your duty, and we'll be as happy as the day is long," he said, and with another kiss let her go free. "Now give me the paper, and I'll read you the news. All sorts of things have been happening, and we have been too happy to mind; but

now, you know, it is time to think of our duties, now we've come back to the world."

It was with a relief which frightened her that Isabel felt herself set free. His very fondness, which a little while ago had made her so happy, seemed suddenly to have grown an insult and degradation. Her heart was bleeding from a hundred wounds: the life before her seemed to darken visibly before her eyes. But she sat down, placing a chair opposite to where he sat in his slippered ease, and took out that dreary fancy work, not daring to cross his mood or rouse his anger. Now and then a faint sound, as of her child's voice, went through and through her. But she dared not take any notice that little Margaret was there, or do anything which could direct Stapylton's attention to her. Poor little Baby Margaret, hitherto absolute mistress and queen of hearts, was now banished to a distant room on sufferance—her very mother putting her out of her arms with a sense of relief, and only longing, praying, listening, in an agony lest the little voice should be heard. Isabel sat like a creature in a dream, hearing her husband read out the bits of news that pleased him, making stitches in her doleful embroidery, by times saying something in reply to him, she knew not what; asking herself, Was she dreaming,—was she awake,—was this herself that sat here, or some spectre playing her part? Her first evening in her own house! Her husband still so lover-like; her child under the same roof—and she so miserable. Was it a dream, or could it be true?

CHAPTER XXIII.

A DAY or two passed in idleness, not unlike the honeymoon idleness of Ranza Bay. Stapylton lounged out and saw the steamer come and go, and lounged back again with nothing to occupy him, sometimes lavishing caresses upon his wife, sometimes sullen to her, complaining of the delay and the time he was losing, and of being buried alive in "such a hole as this." Sometimes he would go out fishing on the loch, and already these intervals had become a relief to Isabel. She had managed to keep her baby out of his way. When he was gone, she would rush to the room in which the child and her attendant had been placed, and take little Margaret to her bosom, now and then forgetting herself in the baby's "flichterin' noise and glee." Her husband had not even as yet remarked the addition of Nelly Spence to the household. The child and its nurse thus lived ignored, their presence known, but not acknowledged,—a position which could not last, and which at once humiliated Isabel, and made her wretched. Why should she see her baby by stealth as if it were a sin? Why should she be afraid to keep the child in her arms when she saw him coming? She reproached herself with cowardice and meanness a hundred times in a day; yet always shrank and put her darling down when Stapylton was seen approaching, with a feeling which was partly pride and partly fear. But it was evident that this state of things could not last.

One morning, about a week after their establishment at Kilcranion, a message came to Isabel from Janet Macfarlane, begging her to go to Ailie. It was while

they were seated at breakfast, that the message arrived. "Eelin," the "lass" who had been witness of the first meeting between Mrs. Lothian and her former lover, was Janet's messenger. "Eh, mem, there's word frae Ardnamore," said the young woman; "you'll have heard of a' that's come and gone. Eh, I would have brought ye the paper if I had thought ye didna ken. He's joined thae radicals that are aye plotting; and it was some awful plan to blow up the king. And Ardnamore he's been blown up himself instead, and it's no thought he'll live. And there's been letters. You wouldna have thought the mistress was that taken up with him, when he was here; but she's ta'en her bed, and we dinna ken what to do. And auld Janet—I'm meaning Mrs. Macfarlane—has awfu' confidence in you. If you were to come, she thinks maybe Ailie—eh, Gude forgive me, I'm meaning the mistress—would mind what you would say."

"If you'll wait a little, Helen," said Isabel, "I will see what I can do." She went back to her husband with a little excitement. "You never told me," she said, "that there was something in the papers about Mr. John. And now they say he is dying, and I am sent for to Ailie. Poor Ailie! she scarcely said goodbye to him when he went away; and she will feel it now. Horace, will you get the gig and drive me over the hill, or must I wait for the boat?"

"Neither the one nor the other!" he said. "Why should you go to every Ailie in the country-side when they send for you? Nonsense! You have no official position now, Isabel. You are my wife, and I won't have you go!"

"But, Horace, I must!" said Isabel, quite unsus-

icious that this was the voice of authority. "
Lilie! I had to do with her marriage, though I
ot wish it—and I was there when he went a
nd I am Margaret's sister. There is nobody she
peak to like me. I will stay as short a tim
ossible, but I could not refuse to go."

"By Jove! but you shall refuse to go," he
when I say it. If that is what you think your
; is not my view. Tell the woman I'll see h
ericho first! *My* wife trotting about the count
very fool that sends for her! No, no. Don't say
ing, Isabel. I tell you, you shan't go."

She stood gazing at him with amazement so
lete that there was no room for any other fee
bedience after this fashion had never so muc
ntered into Isabel's conception of the duties of a
er mind was incapable of grasping this strangest
lea. "I am sorry you don't like it," she said;
orace, you know—I can't refuse."

"I don't know anything of the sort," he said;
hall refuse. Here, Jenny, Mary—whatever your
—Mrs. Stapylton can't come. Do you hear?
our mistress, or whoever it was that sent you;
as got something else to do than dance attendanc
he parish now. Mrs. Stapylton is not going; do
ear? Now, take yourself off and shut the door!'

"If the leddy will tell me herself," said I
tanding her ground. Cæsarism of this description
nknown on Loch Diarmid, and naturally the
ight of a rampant husband awoke the spirit o
emale messenger. "Oh, mistress," she added, tu
vith sudden softening to Isabel, who sat dumb
rimson cheeks *and downcast* eyes, "dinna forsa

in our trouble. There is no one on a' the Loch that can be of any help to us but you."

"Go ben to the kitchen and get a cup of tea after your long walk," said Isabel; "and I will come and speak to you, Helen. Go now and sit down and rest."

Her voice was very low, she did not raise her eyes; but the woman understood and had compassion, and obeyed her without a word. A sudden harsh assumption of authority is a dangerous matter in any relationship, and perhaps most dangerous of all in that difficult transition from the love-dream to the ordinary conditions of life. Isabel's proud and delicate spirit had never yet received so strange a shock. She sat dumb for the moment, quivering so painfully with the blow that she was unable to speak.

"You may say what you like to her besides," said Stapylton; "but this you must just make up your mind to say, my love,—that you shan't go."

There was a certain air of smiling insolence in the young man's face. He was making his first experiment in the matter of sovereignty—beginning as he meant to end, he would have said.

"Is this how it is to be?" said Isabel, with quivering lips. "I—don't understand. It never came into my mind before. Oh, Horace, is this how it is to be between us? It could never be any pleasure to me to do what you don't like; but is it to be you who are to judge always, and never me?"

"Didn't you promise to obey me, you little rebel?" he said, still with artificial playfulness; "and, of course, I mean to be obeyed. You may trust me not to give up my right."

"But not as a baby obeys," said Isabel, in a which was scarcely audible.

He got up with a laugh which jarred on a excited nerves.

"I don't mind how you make it out," he said I mean you to do what I like, and for this on had better make up your mind. You shan't go!

It was at this moment—moved by what ev gestion it is impossible to tell—that Nelly Spenc had gradually been growing to a fever point dignation at the little notice taken of her baby denly opened the door of the room in which momentous discussion was going on. They both round, and for a moment nothing was visible; little Margaret, staggering in her first baby run. swift and unsteady through the open door, her att appearing behind her, stretching out sheltering "She's walking!" said Nelly, with a shriek of c And Isabel, for the moment forgetting all her w gave a cry of instinctive joy, and, turning roun out her arms. Stapylton turned away with ar He went to the window, turning his back on the —so pretty a scene!—the young mother meltir a sudden transport out of her first hard passage ginning life; the young nurse, half frantic with tion, the little fairy creature rushing into the arn out for it. Never was happy household yet, in such a moment does not detach itself from the of years like a picture—sweet, evanescent, in delight! But here the bonds of nature were t awry. Isabel took her child into her arms with a of happiness, and then signed to its nurse to go and turned *round with a* deeper pang of pa

banished even her own humiliation out of her mind. She gazed wistfully at her husband, not knowing whether to speak to him or remain silent—longing to say, "I will be your slave, only tolerate my child."

"Do you want to drive me mad with that man's child?" he said, turning round upon her with a look of hatred and horror which struck her with consternation; and then went out of the room, out of the house, without another word. She saw him go rapidly past the window while she still sat thunderstruck, holding her baby. Poor Isabel! And this conflict was to last all her life.

She did not know how long she sat thus silent, with a thousand thoughts passing through her mind. She was not thinking; she was stunned, and incapable of any mental action. Her thoughts came and went independently, presenting their arguments before her like so many unseen pleaders. Little Margaret slid from her arms to the floor, and sat there playing with anything that came to hand, gurgling with sweet rills of laughter, sweet murmurs, and those attempts at words which mothers know how to translate. But she took no notice. Slowly the invisible advocates delivered their pleas, and set forth all their reasonings. There rose before her a vision of what must be done, of what it was impossible to do. She was his wife; she had counted the cost and taken the risk, and now the forfeit was required of her. The time had been when she was little Margaret's mother before all; but she had willingly, consciously, taken up another responsibility. She was his wife. Life must be transformed, must be so arranged that it should be practicable with him and not another. Isabel took the

baby up from the floor and pressed it to her heart with a despair which could find no words. Thus it must be. She had drawn her lot with her eyes open, knowing she must pay some hard price for it, though not this price. The decision to be made was so bitter and so terrible that it quenched down even her impetuous, passionate nature. She could not be angry as she would have been had the occasion been less trivial. She was beyond anger. There was in her whole being the silence of despair.

The whole day passed over her in a hush like that which comes before a storm. She framed the softest message she could, and sent Eelin back with it, declaring that it was impossible she could come. And she occupied her mind with schemes for her baby's comfort, and for keeping some trace of her own recollection before the child when they should be parted, perhaps for ever and ever. For ever and ever—that was most likely—with the great ocean between them, and life more bitter than any ocean. Jean would be good to the child she knew, and Miss Catherine would keep a watchful eye on her—and— Only the mother would have no part—no part in little Margaret's life. She could not shed any more tears, they were all dried up, scorched up out of her eyes; but she sat all day by herself, and thought, and thought. Yes, this was how it must be. Her own life was decided and settled by her own deed; and Isabel would not say even to herself what a prospect she felt to be before her. But to expose Margaret to the hatred of the man who ought to stand to her in the place of a father, to make her little life subject to such storms, to give her no happy home, full of love and tender freedom, but a nook on

sufferance in the house of "another family"—better let the mother's heart break once for all, and the child be happy, caressed, above all criticism. Thus it must be.

When Stapylton returned that evening his mood was changed. Perhaps he was ashamed, and felt that he had gone too far. Perhaps it was a natural revulsion towards the wife he was still so fond of, that he was determined to have her all to himself. He never mentioned little Margaret or made any reference to her, but he was very tender to Isabel. "I am an ill-tempered fellow," he went so far as to say; "and if I make myself disagreeable sometimes, my Isabel must forgive me." And Isabel, for her part, was worn out; much emotion had worn her as great fatigue might have done. She yielded her soul to the sweetness when it came. She laid her head on his shoulder when he drew her to him, and cried, and despaired, and yet was consoled. She would make her sacrifice still; perhaps it was natural that he should feel so,—he, a man to whom Margaret's father had been a rival and an enemy. She would make her sacrifice, and if she should die in his arms afterwards there might be consolation in her end. Thus Isabel did as wives have done from Eve's time downwards—was wounded to the heart, and then was comforted, and felt her wounds heal when the cloud blew over; and flattered herself that it would not come again, or at least not in this way; and felt her love through all, raising its head like the daisies after a heavy footstep—often crushed, and ready to be crushed again, but between whiles believing in the bright skies and the healing dew. Even, perhaps, the sacrifice might not have to be made. That hope sprang in her heart when the morning followed

the night, and the cloud had not come back
haps the sacrifice was not necessary; perhaps
step that had crushed her was but a passing
—accidental not habitual—and might never
again.

"I am going to Maryburgh fair," he said
next morning. "Smeaton has written to me
away the cattle I bought. But I don't want the
so I must sell them if I can. I shall be back
last steamer at dusk."

"Then that is farewell to all your thou
settling here?"

"Farewell was said long ago," he said,
"indeed, there was something very tempting—
don't look at me so eagerly; I don't mean to r
hopes—America is the place for you and me.
course, if there was any great temptation——'

"Oh, Horace, if I might hope it would b
cried Isabel, with her heart leaping to her mou

"Well, well, wait and see what will happ
said cheerfully; and in that sudden gleam of
she hung about him, feeling all her fears and
melt away like mists in the sunshine. She kis
with her very heart on her lips before he
Isabel had been bred in all the reticence of
Scottish maiden; her kisses were few, and ver
bestowed, but in this moment of revulsion, h
smote her for all the hard things she had bee
ing. "Dear Horace!" she said, hanging ab
"I am always so hasty; but every day I wi
you better."

"And every day you grow sweeter," he s
a lover's *looks—and thus* they parted; he to

which should carry him to Maryburgh, she to little Margaret's room to dance her baby, and sing all manner of joyful ditties to the child. "Oh, my bonnie darling, shall I keep you after all?" was the burden of Isabel's gladness. She sang the words over and over in her joy, as if they had been the *refrain* of a song; and little Margaret crowed and clapped her baby hands in reply, and the whole was like the blessed awaking from a bad dream.

When Isabel had exhausted herself with enjoyment, she sat down at length, having ordered the daintiest dinner she could contrive for his comfort when he should return, and began to her wifely work, sewing on buttons and putting her husband's "things" in order. It was pleasant to be engaged about his "things" at such a moment. She said to herself that she had done him injustice, and her heart in the revulsion went back to him with a warmth beyond the fervency even of her first love. The cloud had blown past,—surely for ever. She had misconceived him altogether. While she had supposed him to be so harsh and unsympathetic, was it not evident that all the time he had been overcoming his own prepossessions, bringing himself to acquiescence in her desires? Her heart uttered confessions of her sin against him, and praises of his goodness, while she put the buttons on his shirts. And little Margaret played at her feet, and the sunshine came in and lighted on the baby's golden head, and for almost the first time since her marriage Isabel's heart was light, and her happiness was unclouded as the day.

It was about two o'clock in the afternoon when the messenger whom Stapylton had sent from Maryburgh reached the house. It was one of the men upon the

pier, whom Isabel knew. He brought her a little note, written in pencil, from her husband, sending the key of a desk of his which he always kept locked.

"*I want some money*," Stapylton wrote. "*I see something here I can buy with advantage, but I have not money enough. Open the right-hand drawer above the pigeon-hole; be sure you don't touch anything else—and send me a pocket-book you will find in it. Remember not to touch anything else, for there are things in it which belong to other people, and I can't have my papers interfered with. Lock it up again as soon as you have taken out the pocket-book, and send me back the key.*"

Isabel was a little startled by the note, anticipating evil at the sight of it, as women instinctively do. And she was a little fluttered by the haste of the messenger, who had to return by the boat in half-an-hour, and was very pressing. She gave little Margaret over to Nelly Spence, and put aside her work and hastened upstairs to her room where the desk was. The very fact of his wishing to buy something, whatever it might be, was an additional proof that he did not mean to go away, but was thinking in earnest of remaining at home. She ran lightly upstairs, and went to the old-fashioned, brass-bound desk which had so often roused her curiosity. She did not remember ever to have seen him open it. It had belonged to his grandfather, he had once told her, and had secret drawers in it, and all kinds of wonders. It was, however, commonplace enough when it was opened. One side folded down to form the slope for writing, and the other was filled with a little range of drawers exactly alike. The right-hand one, however, was quite unmistakable, the

pigeon-hole below was clear of papers, and distinguished it from all the rest. But it was stiff, and cost Isabel a great deal of trouble to open it. She had to pull and pull till the little ivory knob came off, and then her task was more difficult than ever. While she was trying her best to get it open, with the thought in her mind that the messenger was waiting all the time, and the boat ready to start, and her husband fretting for the man's arrival, her finger suddenly caught something below, which came out with a little rush and click as of a spring. It came upon her hand and hurt it, which was the first thing that attracted her attention. Then it occurred to her that she might now get a better hold upon her obstinate drawer; and putting her hand in behind, she at length pulled it out triumphantly, and found the pocket-book, the object of her search. No curiosity was in Isabel's mind as to the other contents of the desk. She shut the drawer hastily, and only then looked at the smaller one below, which she had involuntarily opened. It would not push back again in haste, like the other. She stooped over it to adjust the spring, thinking of nothing. Next moment she uttered a low cry of horror. The pocket-book fell out of her hand on the floor. She stood paralysed,—immovable; her lips dropping apart like the lips of an idiot, her face blanched as by a sudden whisper of Death.

"I must go!" said the man below stairs; "he'll be that rampaging I'll no daur face him. Gang up the stair, my woman, and ask the mistress if I'm to bide here a' day."

"The boat's aye late," said the servant-woman out of the kitchen. "Take patience, man; she'll no keep

you waiting, unless there's some reason for it; a
busy wi' my cakes, and canna stir, rampage as
as ye please."

"Then, lassie, gang you," said Stapylton
senger. "She's been half-an-hour up the stai
an-hour, as I'm a sinner!—and her man cursi
swearing a' the time on Maryburgh pier. Rise
ask, like a bonnie lass! Tell her—answer or
swer—I maun away."

"Oh, ay, I'll gang," said Nelly Spence; "l
me my wean. Now she's walking she's mair
than when she was carried. She's away, l
down the passage before ye ken."

"Rin first and speak after," said the man.
woman, maun I gang up the stair to the
mysel?"

Thus stimulated, Nelly Spence, with litt
garet in her arms, went upstairs to the bed-roo
She knocked, but there was no answer. Sh
softly, then louder, getting frightened; fina
opened the door and looked in. Isabel was
in the same attitude, like a creature suddenly c
into ice or snow. Her side face, which was v
Nelly, was so ghastly white, and so like the
an idiot, that the girl was dumb with panic. S
quickly forward, making a noise which at last
to catch Isabel's ear. Her action, then, was
ordinary as her looks had been. She turned
round, and placed herself between the new-co
the open desk, going back upon the latter and
her hands behind her, as if to conceal it.

"What do you *want*?" poor Nelly suppos

say; but it was a babble, instead of words. She was like the old people who were paralyzed.

"Oh, Isabel," cried Nelly, in her terror forgetting all conventional rules of respect, "Oh, Isabel, dinna look at me like that! I'll rin for the doctor. You've had a stroke!"

"No!" Isabel said, with an imperative gesture; and then, though her look did not change, she struggled into utterance.

"What do you want—what is it?" she said.

"It's the man," cried Nelly; "he's wanting his answer. But, oh, you're fitter to be in your bed. I'll rin for the doctor, and tell him you're no able. Oh, what will we do?—a young thing like you!"

"Tell him," said Isabel, regaining her voice by degrees—"to tell—Mr. Stapylton—there's no answer. You hear me, Nelly: there is—no answer. That is what he is to say."

"But, eh," said Nelly, with anxious kindliness, "he'll be awfu' angry. If you would let me help you, and find it, whatever it was——"

"Hold your peace!" said Isabel, harshly. "Go and tell him. There is—no answer. And leave me to myself. I have something here I want to do."

"Is she going to kill herself? Does she want him to kill her?" Nelly said, talking to herself as she went down the stair. When she was gone, Isabel, with unsteady step, came across the room and locked the door. She caught a glimpse of herself in the glass as she passed, and wondered vaguely who it was. Then she went back to the open desk, and took out the little secret drawer, and carried it, staggering as she went, to the window. There was but one thing in

it;—a little brooch set round with pearls, with hair in the centre, attached to a long gold pin. Adhering to the pin were still some ragged threads of the cambric in which Isabel, with her own hands, had placed it one June morning, not yet two years ago. This was the treasure shut carefully away in Horace Stapylton's secret drawer.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THERE are times when a great shock paralyses the whole being, and makes it incapable of action; and there are other circumstances under which it stimulates every power, sends the blood coursing to the heart, and fills the mind with such promptitude of despair, as renders thought unnecessary. At this awful moment both these effects were produced on Isabel. She was paralysed. The sight of that terrible token changed her into stone. In one second of time her warm, young life, the eager mingling of fears and hopes which had been tingling to her very finger-points, died in her, and she with them, as if she had been shot to the heart. The effect was as instantaneous as complete. All trembling with anxiety, suspicion, and hope, conscious of life's sweetness, conscious of its bitterness, trembling, hoping between the two, with no power to settle her own fate, an expectant, eager creature, dependent on the decision of another—and the next moment as dead and still as if she had been a marble statue—shot, stabbed to the heart. She might have been standing there for an age like a dead woman, when Nelly's entrance brought her to life again. But the resurrection was as complete as the murder had

been. When she once more became aware of the changed and horrible fact of her own existence, a supernatural energy seemed to have poured into Isabel's veins. It was not produced by thought, or by any effort of hers. This, like so many other processes, seemed to be wrought independent of her, in the secret places of her mind, by means not in her control. The convulsive trembling of her figure steadied gradually as she stood by the window looking at that terrible evidence of what had happened to her; and, as it did so, a sudden, swift, indescribable sense of what she had to do swept through her mind—not what she had to suffer; that was swept out of sight for the moment; besides she was dead, and there was no sense of suffering in her; all she was conscious of was what she had to do.

She took the fatal little drawer first, and locked it up in a box of her own, but walked over the pocket-book on the floor in utter unconsciousness, having lost perception of everything that did not concern the one frightful subject-matter of her thoughts. Then, with hasty hands, she put on her bonnet and cloak, and hurried out to little Margaret's room, leaving Stapylton's desk open. She took the baby out of Nelly Spence's arms, and began to put on its out-door dress. She had got over her trembling, but her face was ashy white, paler than Nelly had ever seen any living creature before. "Oh, where are ye going? Oh, let me take the wean! Oh, mistress, ye're no fit to be out of your bed!" wailed Nelly in her consternation. Isabel made no reply. She was even so far mistress of herself as to be able to smile a ghastly smile, and nod her head at the baby as she put on its wraps. "I shall

be back before—dinner," she said as she went away. "Before dinner!" Could anything be more horrible than to think of the household table, the common daily use and wont, in face of such a tragical conclusion? But Isabel took no note of her own words. She took the child in her arms; she repeated the same explanation to the maid in the kitchen; and, passing out, took the way across the hill to Loch Diarmid. Little Margaret, in her infant unconsciousness, babbled sweetly over her mother's shoulder, pulling Isabel's veil and bonnet with her dimpled hands, and smiling radiantly at the unaccustomed pleasure. Her little voice ran on, with now and then a half-articulate word, in broken rills of baby exclamation, wonder, delight, amusement —the little, loving, broken monologue, which is so sweet to kindred ears; and Isabel, without a look round her, without a pause, pressed on. It was a lonely, long, dreary road, over the hill. She had never carried such a burden before, and the baby was lively and happy, and not to be kept quiet. The only conscious thought in the mother's mind was, Oh, if she would but go to sleep, and relieve the tired arms in which she danced and frolicked. Once or twice Isabel sat down for a moment on the roadside, but dared not prolong her rest, she had so much—so much to do. The early winter twilight was fading when she went in breathless to the Glebe Cottage, and sank, without a word, into the great old high-backed chair in the kitchen. Jean, with joy and wonder, and then with wonder and consternation, rushed forward to take the child, and overwhelmed her with welcome and astonishment. "Eh, my wee darling—eh, Isabel, my bonnie woman! Where have ye come from so sudden?

There's nae boat at this hour!" Jean said in her amaze. And then the delight of the child's return fortunately occupied her, and gave Isabel a moment's breathing-time. Breathless, fainting, weary to death, she lay back in the great chair. Her arms ached, her head ached, her heart was panting with the effort for breath. She seemed to require rest only—nothing but rest. The warmth of the fire, the quiet, the familiar objects round her, lulled her as if they had been singing a cradle-song. A confused longing came over her to end here and stay, and go no farther. Alas, how was she ever, ever to retrace that weary, darkling path over the hills!

"You've never walkit all the way?" cried Jean at last. "It's enough to have killed you, Isabel, my woman! You're awfu' white, and ye dinna say a word. Is there anything ails ye? and what has brought ye walking with the wean ower the hills? Eh, I'm feared something's happened! Bide a moment, my bonnie woman, till I get you a glass of sherry wine!"

The wine restored Isabel a little to herself. It brought back the energy which had begun to fail her. "I have brought you Margaret," she said. "It is nothing. I could have sent Nelly, of course, but it was—pleasanter—I mean I liked better—to bring her myself. She is fond of you—you'll be very, very good to her—whatever happens!"

"Oh, Isabel! what should happen?" cried Jean.

"One never knows," said Isabel, drearily. "That is not what I meant to say; I mean, you'll take great care of my baby; she is all I have. Except for her, what do I care what happens? Nelly will come, you

now, with her things. I will send her as soon
et—home."

"But, my bonnie woman, there's no boat to-ni
ried Jean. "Walk! na, I would never hear of
'e canna walk a' the way to Kilcranion ower
ills."

"I must go at once," said Isabel. And then, a
he thought, Must she go? came over her. Coul
he stay here in her own house, where she had t
efuge? Were there not her old friends, who w
rrange everything for her? A sudden sickenir
eart came over her; and yet her whole being w
onfused, that she was not sure whether it wa
ere walk, or what would come after that walk, v
verwhelmed her most.

"Oh, if you would hide me!—Oh, if ye w
ake me away!" she cried, in the misery of her s

"Hide ye! take ye away? Oh, Isabel, has it
o this? Ay, I'll hide ye—ay, I'll defend ye!"
ean, roused up to sudden wrath. "Trust to me.
onnie woman. Nae man, were he the king,
ome rampaging here!"

These very words, which expressed the de
vil Jean could dream of, and which yet wer
rifling, so shallow, compared to the facts, awoke I
ully to a sense of her position. She rose up,
osing herself as best she could.

"Hush!" she said. "I must go back. I was s
ig—like a fool. I have a great deal to do. The
hing is, that you'll take care of little Margaret; y
ever let her out of your sight. My bonnie dar
t me kiss her, and I'll go."

"No this *night*—*oh*, no this night!" cried

"Ye'll drop down on the hill, ye'll be that wearied; it's enough to be your death."

"That would be the best of all!" said Isabel under her breath. When she was in movement she was not conscious how weary she was; but as she stood thus, with the child holding out its arms to her, with the old home wooing her, with a possibility, it might be, of escape and flight thus presenting itself before her, her limbs ached, her heart failed. But no, no; that which had to be done could be done only by herself.

"I must be going now," she said, faintly. "Don't ask me any questions. Let me kiss her once again. Oh, you've been a kind woman to Margaret and me! Promise me that you'll never—never, forsake my little bairn!"

"Isabel, dinna break my heart. How could I forsake her, the darling, that was born into my very arms?"

"And you'll never let her out of your sight?" said Isabel. She was gone again before Jean could say another word. When she rushed, with the child in her arms, to the door, the young mother was already almost out of call, speeding up the hillside like a shadow. The sun had set even beyond the western hills, and had been out of sight here at the Glebe for three-quarters of an hour. "Though it's longer light on the other side of the hill, it'll be dark night before she gets home," said Jean to herself. "Oh, did I no aye say it was to her destruction she was taking that English lad?" She stood and watched as long as the retreating figure was visible, with thoughts of rushing after her, of appealing to Miss Catherine or the Dominie,

or some one who could aid. "But wha can in
between man and wife?" Jean said to herself
homely wisdom, shaking her head as she went
her fireside with the child who had been thus su
dropped into her arms. "My wee pet! at le
may be easy in her mind about you," she said
tears, kissing the little creature, who could g
explanation; and thus accepted the mystery on
for this night at least, it appeared no light c
thrown.

Isabel had reached the middle of her ho
course before she awoke to any sort of consci
of what was before her. To go on, to conq
aching, the weariness, the sinking of her hea
the long dreary road, was all that occupied her
And it was only at the very height of its dre
when she suddenly looked round her, and saw
surrounded by the moor, with the night wind
through the withered heather, and the dark sha
the hills inclining towards her, like so many s
giants, that the reality of her position actuall
upon her. The one indispensable necessity of
her child out of danger, had, until it was accom
delivered her from all the questions that rem
be settled. That was the first thing to be do
the haste, and speed, and motion, and wearin
little Margaret's voice in her ear, had kept h
any possibility of thinking. Now, in the da
night, on the summit of the solitary path, the
clouds hanging heavy over her, the road st
lonely without a passenger visible, no house
sound of human creature—nothing audible
sighs of the *wind, the* rustle of the heather

distant moan of the loch against its shores—as if a floodgate had been opened, the power of thought rushed back upon her. It came upon her like a flood, taking away her breath and her strength. All at once she sank down on the roadside, not from weariness—though every nerve was tingling with the physical strain—but rather to resist the sudden sweep of the torrent, which threatened to carry her away. She sat down, and leaned her head upon her hands, and tried to think. But she could not think; she could but crouch there, and let the tide of wild imaginations, associations, fancies of all kinds, rush over her. Was it on such another night as this—darker still, more cloudy and stormy—that one man had struck another down, and wrenched from his breast that little token of innocent affection and tragic misery? O God! could it be? Then she saw herself at the Opera, with that fatal eye upon her; she recalled the sense of something malign regarding her, of which she had been conscious in the Manse garden the night before the minister's death. These recollections and impressions came one by one, each thrusting her through with a sharper and a sharper dart. She tried to escape from them—to think what she ought to do. Something there was that must be done. She was going back to him—her husband, her husband's slayer—to him who had dared to take her into his arms, knowing the awful ghost that stood between them. Isabel hid her face, as if some accusing eye had looked at her, and cried aloud, in the agony of her shame. How was she polluted!—she who was Margaret's mother and the minister's wife! He had come to her with that blood on his hand, knowing his guilt, and plucked her like a flower—taken her

in spite of herself—made her his, to bear his
and bound her to him for ever and ever. She w
upon that sword as she sat and rocked herself o
dark wayside. It seemed to her as if some
avenging angel—as if God himself—had put the
weapon through her heart, and held it there, d
her struggles, keeping her to a sense of the dee
of her misery, preventing her from thinking
what she must do. What was she to do? Oh,
could only think of that question, instead of wri
and aching, and stabbing herself through and th
with this!

But the night grew darker, and the wind m
louder, and Isabel started with a thrill of natural f
She stood on the highest point of the road, feelin
there was still a choice before her, for one wild mo
She might turn, and fly back to the Glebe even
She might shut fast the doors, and send for her fr
and barricade herself from the approach of the mur
her husband's murderer—that was what he was!
stood with her breath coming in sobs against the
all alone in heaven and earth, to make her dec
Oh! she could so easily gather a body-guard to d
her!—friends that would hold her fast, and her
and keep her from all fear. What need had she
back, to see his dreadful murderer's face—to be to
by the hands which—— Isabel turned and m
rush downwards on the side of Loch Diarmid t
safe and silent home. Then she paused, and pai
retraced her steps. Her heart was gashed and
two by that awful sword, which God would not
draw for a moment. She was the wife at once
slayer and the slain, God help her! If she se

her friends to avenge her husband, would not that be to kill her husband? Kill her husband! She walked up and down like a wild creature on the top of the hill. The clouds seemed to be drooping over her, so near they rolled in their great, tumultuous waves; big drops of rain fell from their skirts, like something cast at her out of the heavens. The storm was rising from Loch Diarmid as if to hunt her before it down to the gloomy shores of Loch Goil. Over there, in the west, there was a pale glimmer that seemed to direct her—Where? To him who, no doubt, was now waiting for her—the man whose name she bore—whose wife she was; her first love—her worst enemy. Was she to devote herself to him, loathing him as she did? Was she to denounce him, loving him as she did? What, oh! what—was there no counsel in heaven or earth?—was she to do?

When she arrived at the house Isabel was drenched with the torrent of rain which had swept her before it down the dark slope of the hill. The blast had been so violent, and the feverish strength of excitement was so great in her, that she had made up for all the time she had lost on the summit by the swiftness of the descent. And when she reached home she found that her husband had not yet returned. "The boat's no in yet," said the maid from the kitchen; "and, oh! mem, but you're wet; you'll have time to change your wet things afore the maister can be back."

"And where's the bairn?" said Nelly, open-mouthed.

"You must pack up all her things," said Isabel, collecting all her powers, "and take them on to the Glebe. I left her at the Glebe with——Mrs. Diarmid.

If it is too late to-night go to-morrow morning. I don't think I shall have her here again."

The maids were in a panic, alarmed for her sanity. They looked at her with suspicious looks. "Mrs. Stapylton," said Nelly, with an effort for breath, "you're sure you ken what you're saying. Oh! dinna be angry, if you're *yoursel.* You're sure you've done the wean no harm?"

"Me! harm my darling!" said Isabel, incredulous that the fear could be real; and then a blaze of momentary indignation came to her aid. "Go to your work both of you," she said; "and don't take it upon you to criticize what I do. Stand aside, Nelly, I am going up-stairs."

They let her pass them with momentary bewilderment, not knowing what to do. "But I'll tell him as soon as he comes in," said the elder woman; "a man ought to know."

"You'll do nothing of the kind," said Nelly, who had a spirit. "She's mair like a living creature now, and no so like a ghost. Bide, and let him find out for himself."

"But, woman, the bairn!"

"Never you mind the bairn. She's safe in the Glebe, I dinna doubt, with Jean. They've had some quarrel about her," said Nelly, with precocious insight, "and this is the upshot. Let us haud our tongues, and see what will come o' 't. Eh, woman! a' body said ill would come o' 't; and ye see it was true."

"As she has made her bed so must she lie," said the other, sententiously; and she went back to her kitchen to see after the dinner, which was being prepared all the same, whatever tragedies might come to

pass. Nelly stole upstairs after Isabel; but dared not follow her to her room, much as she longed to do so; and lights began to be visible in the windows, and everything was made ready for the husband's coming home.

Isabel had come to herself; her thoughts had lulled as the wind lulled, for no reason she knew of—perhaps out of weariness. When she went into her room she perceived the desk standing open, the pocket-book lying on the floor; and had so much possession of herself as to put them away, restoring the book to its place and closing the desk. She could do this with a certain calm, feeling as if her discovery had been made years ago, and since then she had had time to face the idea and accustom herself to it. She took off her wet gown, and dressed herself as usual. All this she did mechanically, in a sudden hush, scarcely thinking, scarcely feeling anything. When she heard his step coming to the door there arose within her a tempest just as sudden. Should she go down to meet him, or let him come here? Should she wait till he assailed her, or should she announce her awful discovery at once? None of these questions could Isabel answer for herself. She had to act mechanically, not knowing in one moment what she would do the next. He came in with an angry inquiry about "your mistress," which she could hear where she was. His voice was louder than usual; his very step betrayed irritation. But what was his irritation now to her? It even struck her with a curious sense of wonder that he could take the trouble to be moved by trifling causes to trifling passion—he who, as he and she knew—— Mechanically and quite suddenly, as if some spring had been

touched in her of which she was unconscious, s
down, and went into the room. He had plac
self with his back to the fire, full of wrath, wh
evidently ready to burst forth the moment she
The table was spread for dinner. An air of
comfort was about the place; the light was dir
sure—but it was as much as they were used
the candles brightened the white-covered table
gleams of reflection, and the ruddy, quivering
filled the room. All these calm details of
life encircled the two at this dreadful mome
that hypocrisy of nature which cloaks over the
passion; and in the kitchen the dinner was pr
not without much serious anxiety on the part
maid lest the fish should be spoiled; for Stapyl
"very particular" about his dinner, and pr
wrath when anything impaired its perfection.

"Well," he said, when Isabel came into th
"I hope you have something to say for yoursel
did you mean by sending me such a message
I wonder if you are mad, or if it is only pr
obstinacy. No answer? How dared you, whe
sent you my directions, send back such a me
me?"

"Because I was stunned," she said, "and
know what I was saying. Let us not speak
you have eaten. Wait till then. I have much
—to say."

"Much to say!—a great deal too much
doubt," he said; "if you think this sort of th
do for me, you are mistaken, Isabel. You may
know at once. I am not the man to be trif
My wife *must obey me*—do you understand?

have two wills in my house. My wife must obey me!" he went on, striking his hand against the table. "I have borne as much of your self-will as I mean to bear. My wife must have no will but mine."

Isabel looked at him as from some height of knowledge, feeling no movement of anger, no irritation at his words. Oh! to think he should be occupied about matters so trifling at a moment so terrible! To get his wife to obey him! Could he care for that, when this life was over, blasted in a moment, and nothing remained for either of them but a blank existence of despair? Her heart bled for him, making himself angry thus at the merest trifles, not knowing what was to come.

"The dinner is coming," she said, wondering at herself that she could form the words, "and the woman will be in the room. Would you wait till it is over? And you must want food and support," she added, with an ineffable pity. It was not the pity of love. It was the compassion with which she might have fortified a criminal with food and wine, before telling him the awful news of his approaching execution—a human sentiment of pity for a weak creature in unconscious peril, about to be strained to the utmost, and unawares of it. He gave her an angry look, to see what she meant, but could not divine it, so wrapt was she in the unconscious elevation and tragic seriousness of the crisis. He did not know what a crisis it was. And he could not understand the strange superiority of her calm.

"And then the inconsistency of it," he said, moodily placing himself at the head of the table. "You pretend to want me to stay, and when I begin to entertain the

idea, and was actually in treaty for some land, you step in, in your perversity, and break it off by disobeying my orders. What did you mean by it? What reason could you have? By Jove! if I had gone off at once and never come near you again, it would have served you right."

Oh! if he had done so, Isabel murmured within herself; but the servant was in the room, the dinner being placed on the table, and nothing more was practicable. She sat there happily concealed by the cover of the dish placed before her, and made motions as though she were eating, and listened to all his grumbling over the indifferent meal. The fish was spoiled; the meat was badly roasted; the vegetables were uneatable. "If you would give a little more attention to this sort of thing, and waste less time over that precious baby, it would be more to the purpose," he said, "that woman is an idiot; so are all these Scotch women; and, by Jove! I was the greatest idiot of all to come and settle myself down here." Isabel made no answer. That he should be on such a brink, and yet be disturbed by the arrangement of the grasses on the edge of the precipice! She had no inclination to reply to him, or to take offence. She gazed at him across the table wistfully, with a compassion that was almost tender, and yet felt she could not go to him, could not touch him, or bear his touch, not for all the world.

Then there came the moment when the table was cleared and the door closed, and they sat looking at each other with the two candles lighting the little white space between them. There was perfect quiet in the house. The maids were in the kitchen,

frightened, not knowing what might happen, with the door shut between them and their master and mistress. Outside, the little world was hushed; not a sound, except an occasional blast of rain on the windows, or melancholy plash of the loch on the beach, breaking the utter silence; still as the grave, which seemed to rise up between the two as they looked at each other in the pause before the storm.

"Well?" said Stapylton.

Isabel had made no preparation of what she was to say. She did not know what words would come to her lips. She felt herself passive, not so much an actor as the spectator of this scene. The only thing she had done was to bring down with her, wrapped in her handkerchief, the little secret drawer of his desk containing the awful token she had found. When he looked across at her, demanding with contemptuous defiance her apology or explanation, she gazed back at him for a moment without a word to say. Words would not come to her aid. She took up her enclosure and unfolded it with trembling hands. She began to tremble over all her frame, even to her lips, which refused to move articulately. He sat looking on unsuspicious, surprised, and scornful, while she fumbled with the handkerchief. Then she rose up and held it out to him. Her face was as pale as death; her eyes dilated; her hands, in both of which she held it, shaking wildly, "Look what I found!" she cried, with her eyes fixed upon him. They were the only things steady about her. Her voice was inarticulate; her arms powerless. All her life had retreated into her eyes.

He sprang up to his feet at the same moment, and

swore a great oath, bending over the table to s
it was. Then he fell back in his chair again,
as she was, trembling as she did. He was t
surprise. "Good God, Isabel!" he said, "Go
Isabel!" stumbling at the words almost as
"what do you mean?"

"Look, and see," cried Isabel, with
suddenly opened! "look and see! oh, man! w
no other woman in the world that you shoul
me vile and make me miserable? Was there
spot in the world, that you should come to sh
here? You had eaten his bread and drunk
You had taken my heart's love and the flowe
youth. Could you not have been content? W
thinking you no harm, doing you no harm—
came and killed my man, my blessed man! A
that was not enough. What harm was I doing yo
creature with my bairn, that you should com
and pollute me, and put his blood on me? O
and see! Ye took me to your arms with that h
your mind. How dared you do it, Horace Sta
How dared ye put yourself with that blood up
between the dead and me?"

He had recoiled and shrunk away from her,
back his chair. He had been so taken by surpr
his very wits failed him. "For God's sake
scream at me," he cried, with a thrill of terro
you know they are listening? For God's sake,
speak low, whatever you have to say."

Then she gave a sudden low cry, and sa
into her seat. She had not said it to herse
had never permitted herself to think it; and ye
bottom of *her heart* there had been a hope

would deny, that somehow he might be able to disprove even what that silent witness said. But he had not attempted to deny it—it was all true, true! And she lived and he lived, with *that* between them. She could not stand, her limbs failed her; but she kept her hand upon that terrible evidence of his guilt, and kept looking at him with her dilated eyes.

"Well," he said, getting up after a terrible pause, "so this is your story—that is what you have made up. You think you can ruin me with it—perhaps you think you can kill me. But it is all a mistake. Throw it into the fire—that is the wisest thing that can be done both for you and me."

"Not yet," said Isabel, under her breath.

"Not yet! Do it of your own will, that will be wisest. Don't drive me to compel you to do it," he said, pacing up and down; and then he came to a sudden pause before her. "One word, Isabel, before things go too far. You know what accusation you are bringing against me? You can't prove it. *That* is no proof. Do you understand what I say? And more, it is not true."

"Oh!" she said, clasping her hands, "Say it is not true! Say you found it—or bought it—or—Horace, say it was not you!"

He paused a moment, gazing at her with an evident struggle going on in his mind whether to seek his own safety or to gratify his feelings. "I neither bought it nor found it," he said at last, under his breath, with a glance of fury in his eyes; and then he added with a sudden shudder, "but what killed him was the fall from his horse."

"And you—oh, tell me a lie rather—tell me a lie!

You!" cried Isabel, "struck an old man, a de
man, when he was down?"——

"Who told you that?" he cried, sharpl
then with another flash of fury,—"How mu
evil had he done to me?" he exclaimed, throw
self into his chair again with great drops of
standing like beads upon his forehead. A
was a pause like a lull in a storm.

Then the gust rose again, menacing and
"You think I am making a confession," he sa
I am doing nothing of the sort. You cannot l
I am safe, at least from the wife of my boso
can't bear witness against your husband, tho
had ten thousand proofs. Thank the law for
all this passion were not a pretence to sta
Was there ever a woman that quarrelled
lover for anything he could do for her sake?"

"For *my* sake!" said Isabel, with a low cry o

"Yes, for what else? for your beauty a
love? Did I know what a cold-blooded phan
were? I swore to have you when I saw yo
side! Curse him! And I have had you.
you will, you can't alter that—you are my w
and not his."

"Oh, don't make me loathe myself mor
do," she cried, wildly. "Don't make me mor
than I am to myself."

"But it is true," he said, once more app
her; "you are mine, and you are harmless ag
I have had my desire, and I have disarmed m
And look here, Isabel, you may as well hear
he added, coming up to her and grasping her
"you need not think *of* putting it into oth

If I did *that* for your sake, what do you think I should be capable of for my own?"

She looked up and their eyes met, and they gazed at each other for one awful moment—he like a tiger ready to spring—she pale and resolute as an image of death.

"Of killing me," she said, never turning her eyes from him, "as you would kill a fly."

"Yes," he said; "you are right—as I would kill a fly; if you put me in danger, or threaten my life."

The voices of both had sunk into absolute calm. The anxious servants in the kitchen concluded that the storm was over. "They're talking as quiet as you and me," Nelly Spence said, with a sigh of relief, as she came back from an anxious vigil at the door. While the husband stood by his wife's chair, with his hand on her shoulder, speaking to her in a voice as quiet and subdued as if the words had been the tenderest words of love.

"It is well you should know what you have to expect," he said. "Submit, and I will forgive all this, and take you back to my heart. Shudder if you please, but my arms are the only ones open to you now; I will take you back, notwithstanding that you mean to betray me; but if you keep your own way, Isabel, understand that I will crush you like a fly."

She kept looking at him, undaunted, not moving a hair-breadth back, nor changing her position. Her shrinking youth, her womanly tremor, all extinguished in an emergency more terrible than any death.

"Would I care?" she said softly, as if to herself; "now that life itself is dead and gone? You cannot frighten me now."

"Like a fly!" he repeated, as if he liked the

image, closing his hand as if upon it; "you, and that child you make your idol. Ah, I touch you now!"

"She is safe out of your reach," said Isabel, though not without a tremble. And he, too, started slightly. The duel was to the death, and his opponent was unencumbered, free to beard him to the last extremity. Every moment the position became graver. An awful calculation ran through the man's mind. It is not easy to crush a resolute, watchful human creature however feeble, like a fly; and a man may threaten, a man may even have struck a sudden blow in the frenzy of jealousy and rage, who could not, with deliberation, in his own defence take a helpless life. And then, he loved her, even now, with passion, which was of the meanest kind, and yet was passion still. He went away from her, and made a circle round the room, feeling his brain reel, and the world around swim and fail. He had her, yet he had lost her; he had lost his power over her. He could not crush her will, any more than he could reclaim her love. He could kill her if he liked, and suffer for it; was that all he could do? Her eyes defied and mastered him, filling him with a sudden despair. He could kill her, but no more. And that he had never meant to do.

"What do you want?" he asked abruptly, seating himself in front of her. "In all this I suppose you mean something. What do you want of me now?"

Then it rushed upon Isabel in a moment what she ought to say.

"You are in danger," she said; "you were seen that night. At any moment they might remember it. *was you.* *And I* know. And never more,—never,

never more can you and me be as we have been. Never more! Sooner, I would die!"

The shudder in her voice thrilled him with wild irritation; but he gave no sign of it, waiting for what she had to say.

"What I want of you is, that you should leave me," she went on. "Leave me—that is all! Go where you were going when we met. Hear me out! I will give you everything I can give you; all I have you shall have; but save yourself, Horace, and go."

"Is it for me you are thinking?" he said; and suddenly his heart melted, and he tried to take her hand.

"Let me be! oh, let me be!" cried Isabel, shrinking from him. "It is for you, too. How could we live and face each other, now I know? I would speak; it would burn out my heart, till, sleeping or waking, I would speak. And—they—would remember it was you. But never will I breathe your name when you are gone. Never will I say a word—never one word of blame. And I will—forgive you!" she said, with a sudden cry.

She was capable of no more.

The servants hearing no sound that alarmed them, began to move about in the house going to bed. The sound of the door being locked, and the shutters closed, roused the two from their deadly argument. After a while, one of the women came in to close the windows for the night, and see if anything more was wanted. This sudden breaking in of the ordinary and common-place, intensified beyond all power of description the tragic misery of the scene. It might have lasted through the whole night but for that. It might have led to any horrible conclusion. Isabel

rose and went up to him, while the maid bar
bolted, and made all fast. "I have said all I
say," she whispered in his ear with white, qu
lips. "Now, it is in your hands."

It never occurred to him that these were
words. When he looked up from his moody
and found her gone, it did not even strike
strange. He followed her upstairs slowly afte
terval of thought. The room was empty, a ligh
ing, his pocket-book lying on the table, and al
of his wife gone. The house was all silent, da
motionless. Then for the first time horror a
came over him. He did not dare make a con
in that stillness, or call for her to come back
Whatever might happen, the woman whom
loved after his fashion had disappeared for eve
Stapylton's life.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE night was a winter's night—long an
Stapylton sat down in his solitary room, and
think. He would let her alone, was his first t
he would leave her at peace. No doubt she ha
away to the baby who was her idol. She mu
told him a lie when she said it was gone.
would leave her to herself: he had plenty to t
Heaven knew. He sat down and tried to thi
then a sudden restlessness seized him, and he
and gazed out of the window into the black ni
which nothing was visible, except now and
blast of rain. That dark world, full of the s
waters, the loch *dashing* on the beach, the rain
through the mirk midnight, the awful silen

whelmed his soul. The darkness hid a spot on which one scene was going on perpetually, for ever.—The old man lying on the road—the horse's hoofs ringing down the hill—the sound of that blow. It was not one event which had happened and was over; was it not going on perpetually—always being repeated under the dark wings of the night? "It was not I that killed him," he said to himself, as he had said a thousand times before. Oh, the intolerable night! so silent, so full of horrible suggestions; and that aching void into which all in a moment any horror might spring. He took up his candle, in his misery, and went wandering all over the house, trying every door. He went to the door of the room in which the servants had locked themselves, and heard them rustling in their beds, and whispering to each other in their panic; and he went to another door from which came no sound—"Isabel, Isabel, come back to me!" he said, and a sigh seemed to breathe through the house, but no answer came. He wanted her not so much to return to him and resume the common life, as to come and protect him at that awful moment, to keep spirits and appearances away from him. He had hours of darkness to get through, and how was he to live through them by himself? It was this panic that made him try the doors; but it sent a deeper panic into the hearts of the three women who listened to his movements in the silence. Isabel, alone in the room where her child had been, believed in her heart that he had come to kill her, as he said, and wound herself up in her misery to bear whatever she might be compelled to bear; and yet trembled and wept, in a stillness as of death.

For seven or eight awful hours of darkness this

torture continued. No one closed an eye
agitated house; and yet save when Stapylton
came, a horrible silence reigned in it, unbroken
complaint or appeal for help. The world outs
asleep and at rest. Who was there to ap
They were all silent as death, not knowing wh
feared, trusting in their locked doors and in the
lessness; all but Isabel, whose spirit was woun
any fate. She sat fully dressed in the furthes
through the long shivering hours of unbroke
ness. Sometimes there would be an interval
and broken sleep, the slumber of exhaustion
stole over her against her will; and then woul
the footstep in the passage, the hand shaking t
the gleam of light underneath, and Isabel drew
together and prayed God bless her child, and
with the blood rushing to her head and her hea
ing loud in her ears, the event which was to
All this was repeated again and again, an
enacted in a darkness horrible as of the grav
stillness which exaggerated every sound; the
creeping and rustling round, as if full of ghost
tators. It was not daylight at last which arou
from that century-long vigil,—daylight did no
till about eight o'clock, when the morning was
vanced. It was the first sound of early life
which came like a voice from heaven to Isabel.
she heard it she rose up softly from the cramp
tion she had maintained all night, thrust up i
corner, and very quietly, with trembling han
heart, utterly unnerved by the horrors of the
prepared to make her escape. She could bea
longer. She had faced the man who had thr
to kill her, with dauntless resolution, on the

night, feeling almost that such a conclusion would be as desirable as any other. But the night had taken away all her courage and force. She trembled like a leaf and could not command herself. Before her, like a vision of heaven, appeared that little room at the Glebe, where her child no doubt was sleeping. If she could but reach that palace of peace! Stealthily, that no sound might betray her, she bathed her hot forehead, and put up her hair, and drew her cloak round her. It was more difficult to open the door without noise, and steal down the stairs, which creaked under her, soft as her steps were. When she stepped out at last into the darkness, which was no longer night but morning, and felt the chill air on her face, and heard behind her sounds of the early world beginning to stir, a certain excitement of hope rose in Isabel's mind. She thought she had escaped. Dark as it was she took the road upwards to the hill, thinking of her old home as the only refuge in which she could trust. The road was long and solitary, and black as night. The wind blew strong in her face, still blowing in the same direction; now and then it brought with it a blast of stinging hail and rain. It might have been midnight, so hopeless was the gloom. But terror had taken possession of Isabel. Her face was haggard with her awful vigil: she had no thought but to escape.

But her husband had heard her movements, soft as they were. He, too, had been watching all the night through, turning over a hundred schemes in his mind. Sometimes he had been overpowered by superstition and remorse, and a helpless sense of terror; and then it was, seeking help, and not with any murderous intention, that he had wandered about the house, in hope of some human fellowship to save him from him-

self. Then he had dozed and dreamed, and fo
inarticulate plans. At first he would not believe
she was in earnest. He had too much self-estim
to believe it possible that a woman whom he
should be able to separate herself from him, fo
reason in the world. She had been horrified fo
moment; that was only natural. But when she s
find that she must get the better of her horror o
part with him for ever, it would be a different m
Eventually, however, a dreadful doubt stole ove
thoughts. A hundred trifles came back to his
which, by degrees, convinced him of the differenc
tween Isabel's way of thinking and his own. She
yielded to him when he required her obedience w
wondering incredulity, not of anger, which could
been got over, but of amazement and incompreher
And then her child. Never more, he felt ass
would she trust her child in his hands. He would
been less severe on that point could he have known

Then vaguely in his dreams there stole over
a longing for freedom; freedom from all those ass
tions of pain and terror: from the place wher
deed had been done, though he had been bold en
to face it; from the woman who knew abou
deed done; from all evidences and recollectio
it. He would forget it if he were not here.
chance blow, what was it, after all, that a
whole life should be clouded by it? And t
free and away with a new life before him!—Stap
had no desire to preserve the unity of his life.
had not imagination or intellect enough to feel t
man cannot break off and reknit again the threa
existence *at his pleasure*. He saw no difficulty i
ing here; or recommencing elsewhere if he

heart on it. All that was easy enough. And then was not he getting tired of the conflict of wills; of a wife who did not content herself with looking beautiful for his pleasure and returning his caresses, but who met him with unintelligible eyes of meaning, which went beyond his meaning, and thoughts, in which, perhaps, she scorned him? Why not take her at her word, and escape from her Puritanism, her startled looks, her incredulous submission? To have a woman look at you as if you were a creature of an unknown species; to see her eyes glance upward when you issued your commands with as much wonder as if you spoke a different language; that was not pleasant. Curse her and her pride! But then, she too would escape. She would gain her freedom now as he gained his. She, too, might make a new beginning. He ground his teeth at that thought. And then he gnashed them together in the darkness with a sudden sense of the failure and blunder of it all, and wild desire to take vengeance on some one. It was at that moment he heard the stealthy sounds of Isabel's escape, and divined what they meant. He was fully dressed as he had been on the previous evening, and, like her, feverish with passion and want of sleep. He took out a pistol from the box in which it reposed beside his desk. The pistol was old-fashioned as well as the desk, and he had been in the habit of calling the weapons curiosities. He charged it hurriedly in the dark, not knowing what he did, and put it in the breast-pocket of his coat, and rushed out after his wife into the rain and wind.

She was half-way up the lower slope towards the Loch Diarmid road, when she heard his step behind her, and felt, with a sudden leap of all her pulses, that not yet—not yet, had she escaped her fate. It was no

surprise to her when he came up and laid his h
her shoulder; the first far-off sound of his st
made it evident to her that there was still a s
to come.

"You are flying from me," he said to her
less. "Do you think I will let you escape fr
like this without another word?"

"I was not thinking of escape," said Isabel,
ing. "I could not bear it longer. I could not
That was all."

"And yet you think I am to bear it," h
making a clutch at her arm. "False accusatio
abuse and scorn, and desertion, and all you
words and contempt of me. You think I am
it all!"

"Alas!" she said, "when did I ever show co
of you? But, oh! let me go. What can we
weary each other with vain words? If we had
relled we might talk and talk and mend it. B
which is between us, is beyond help. Let me g

"No, by God!" he cried, holding her fast,
the price I have paid for you. No! What is to
me from killing you as you say I did—*him?*
not be left alone to think. You shall stay wi
and share with me, or, by God, I will make an
you!"

Isabel felt that her last hour was come. It
dark that she could with difficulty see his face.
was silence and blackness round them—not a
creature from whom to ask help—and if the
been a thousand, she would have asked help fro

"It must be as you will," she said, with the
calm of *despair*—"*as you will!*" and waited,
ing, would it be a knife or a bullet, or the

rible agony of his hands and blows—his hands, which had embraced her so often—at her throat? She closed her eyes instinctively, as if the darkness was not enough and stood waiting, waiting for the touch of the death, which was so near.

"And you have not a word to say for yourself," he said, his breath burning her cheek. "Not a word? Have you nothing to offer me for your life?"

The bitterness of death was upon her; his grasp upon her shoulder was like iron. "Let it be quick!" she said, with a shudder. "Maybe it's best so—Maybe it's best."

"And that is all?"

"Oh! do it and be done," she cried, falling at his feet, "or leave me living for your own sake—for your sake. Is my life worth struggling for *now?* but for yourself let me be——."

"Is that all?" he said again. And then drew something from his breast, and a cold mouth of iron touched Isabel's cheek. An involuntary cry burst from her by instinct. Now it had come. Suddenly she heard a report, and started aside from the sudden flash in the darkness, and fell back, but not wounded. She had been so sure of death that her safety threw her into a convulsive fit of horror and fear; there was an awful moment in which she could not tell what had happened, if it was he who was killed or any one. Then there was a movement, a swing of his arm—his dark shadow was still standing beside her—and the pistol was thrown high over her head, and went dashing down over the rocks, into the black invisible loch, which raged and beat upon the unseen shore.

"Isabel," he said, "give me a kiss before we part."

Oh, awful darkness that enclosed them round and

round! Oh, awful nearness and separation! He melted and sunk within her at that last prayer.

"Oh, Horace, let me die!"

She would have fallen, but for his arms rou but even at that supreme moment he did no why she would rather have died than have be enveloped for the last time in his embrace. Th ing of her heart, the old love rising up within a giant, the struggle of faithful nature which co but could not forsake and abandon, wrung whole being, body and soul. But not his; he her, and he let her go. He stood for a momen darkness before her, and then he turned and wen

It was all over. She called after him "Horace!" in a voice swallowed by the wi sank down on the cold ground, prostrate, cove face with her hands. She could hear his step down the hill and count them, each echoing heart. It was all over. Death, and danger, a and strife, and happiness, had all departed fr Oh, had he but gone without those last words, that kiss, which in the midst of horror and awoke love like a giant to defend his own! Th ness covered Isabel like a mantle, so that no her crouched together on the cold wayside; sounds of nature surrounded her—the loch moa its shore, the wind shouting from the hills, dashing down in gusts of stormy tears—and the cry with which in the madness of her mis might have called him back. She sat there not know how long in the awful morning gloo rose and made her way slowly, sadly, a creat numbed, up the hill, and knew no more of he what had happened to her, till the grey ghos

light suddenly looked her in the face, up among the heather on the summit of the road. It had been stealing round her and she did not perceive it, until, pausing instinctively to take breath, she saw all the hills and the waters suddenly revealed in the colourless light of the morning, and knew that life was over—and that life had begun.

As for Stapylton, he no more comprehended her in that last struggle than he had done through all those years. He kissed her with a sullen renunciation and left her, without *arrière pensée*. He was a little ashamed of the pistol, and the ineffectual threat. No, he had never intended that; why should he kill her? Why should he kill himself? The world held more pleasant places than Loch Diarmid—more women than Isabel. Here the game was over—but there it might begin again. "Come on!" he said to himself; and so went away to look after his clothes and his money, and all that remained to him—since he had no longer any wife.

It was nearly noon before Isabel, stumbling at every step, reached the Glebe Cottage, the aim she had been vaguely struggling to—was it for hours or days? She went in with her haggard face, so changed and drawn with suffering, that Jean gave a cry of terror, and did not know her. She had not even a smile for her child, nor any interest in her. "Let me rest! Let me rest!" was all she could say. Jean put the baby down on the carpet in the parlour, and gave all her care to the young mother thus come back to her for pity and consolation. "Ye've been caught in the storm, my lamb!" she said, tenderly. But Isabel gave no explanation. She suffered herself to be undressed and laid in her own room,—the little chamber

she had occupied for the greater part of
Nothing but a murmur of thanks, or a sudden
or a sigh, came from her as her stepmother ten
caressed her. When Jean questioned her, sh
her head and made no answer. The good wor
driven to her wits' end. To her limited per
it was apparent that there had been a quarrel
the husband and wife about little Margaret; tha
after leaving her child in safety the previou
had come back again to see her, and had beer
in the storm, and that at "any moment" Stapyl
self might appear to claim the runaway. "H
could think she would take it to heart like this
said to herself. But the strange thing was, tha
took no notice of the baby after suffering so n
her. When Jean could bear the mystery
sponsibility no longer, she sent a mysterious
to Miss Catherine: "My mother says, if you ev
for our Isabel, you're to come now, and lose n
said little Mary, who was the messenger, and i
hands the mystery lost none of its power.
bless me, is your mother mad?" was Miss Ca
forcible reply. But notwithstanding, she mad
to get her great waterproof cloak and her u
and set out as soon as there was a pause in
to ascertain what grounds there might be for so
an appeal.

"There is nae love lost between him ar
Jean explained, when Miss Catherine had bee
duced into Isabel's room, and had looked horror-
at the change in her face, without, so far as th
see, being recognised by the sufferer. "But I
bear to *expose the family*; what am I to sa

doctor, if I send for him? When a woman is as ill as that, she should be in her ain house."

"Say!" said Miss Catherine. "It may be life or death—let him see her first, and tell us what is to be done, and then we will think what to say. Let Jamie go at once—if I am not mistaken there is more here than meets the eye."

"I kent they never would 'gree about that wean," said Jean, with her apron to her eyes. "Eh, the darling, that I should speak of her so; I aye said there would be dispeace about wee Margaret. It would have been better to have left her with me."

"If there had not been dispeace about that, it would have been something else," said Miss Catherine; "nothing good could have come out of it—nothing good was possible—it was what we all said."

"She was well warned," said Jean, "if onything could be a comfort to remember at sic a time; but, poor thing, it must never be cast up to her now."

"And where is her man?" said Miss Catherine.

This question was repeated over and over again in many a tone of wonder ere many hours had past. The fact that he did not come to inquire after her all that evening, that no search whatever was made, but the runaway wife suffered to sink into her old home without protestation or appeal, bewildered everybody about. The doctor, and Jean Campbell, and Jenny Spence, and by degrees all the village, and even the parish, grew aghast with wonder. A quarrel about the child was a comprehensible thing, and was received by everybody with many shakings of the head, and declarations of their own foresight. "I aye kent how it would be," said one after another, and for the first moment it would be vain to say that it was anything

less than a sensation of triumph that burst up
Loch. But when the husband did not appear t
friends, and when it began to be rumoured ab
parish that "bonnie Isabel" was lying ill in a
altogether alone and deserted by the man for
she had separated herself from her home a
friends, pity began to take the place of th
gratulation. This was carrying matters too far
next day in the afternoon Nelly Spence came o
hill carrying her own bundle and little Mar
and with a scared and agitated face. Her sto
like wildfire round the Loch. She told the tale
first night of terror till the gossips' hair stood
She told of the exit of both parties in the early m
of Stapylton's re-entrance, of his commands to
keep quiet and wait for their mistress's return
mands which woke in their minds the frantic
that he had thrown her into the Loch in the da
and that she never would come back. They ha
too much frightened, however, by Stapylton's p
and looks to do more than make furtive lit
cursions round the house, and furtive questions
neighbours, none of whom had seen Isabel.
taken his meals as usual, cursing Nelly's "
for her bad cookery, and had occupied himself
all the day long; and at night he had gone
neither of the terrified women having strength
to stop or to interrogate him. It was too la
his departure to take any further steps. They
half the night in their terror still thinking it
that Isabel might return. That morning th
roused the village and made all sorts of frantic s
for her, and at last had ascertained that she h

seen on her way to the Glebe. Such was the story which Nelly told with unbounded fulness of detail. It left the public in more profound ignorance and wilder wonder than before. He had gone away taking everything with him; he had not even asked for her before his departure, and she was too ill to afford any explanations. The women at the doors discussed the matter for hours together, questioning Nelly upon every particular till the girl was driven into partial idiocy; and the men at the smithy took up the tale and gave it a thousand fantastic explanations. But the two were silent who alone had the *fin mot* of the enigma—he who had disappeared into the distance and darkness, and she who lay unconscious in a stupor of exhausted nature, not even aware of her own position. The wonder grew into mystery and sank into silence before Isabel was able, had she been willing, to lend a word of elucidation. And still the Loch keeps the story to be told at intervals with many a wild guess as its meaning—a tale without an end.

It was when Isabel was just beginning to wake into faint gleams of returning life that the visit was paid her which made so much commotion on the Loch. Everybody had learned by this time that Stapylton had "taken it upon him" to refuse permission to his wife to visit Ailie at Ardnamore. And when Ailie, herself pale as a spirit and so weak, that she had to be lifted out of the carriage, passed through the village on her way to the Glebe, the whole population stirred with a hope that now at last the explanation was to come. The cottage was unusually full at the time, of nurses and attendants. Miss Catherine herself rarely left the little parlour where she waited the chances of Isabel's strange disorder; and Nelly Spence was in charge of

little Margaret, and her mother came and went
Jean to attend upon the patient. It was thus
little community, with all grades represented, th
came leaning on her mother's arm. She was
a shadow, and so weak that she could scarce
upright; over her white dress she wore a large
black crape, for she was now a widow. Her
ance was not less extraordinary than before,
visionary eyes had lost their wildness, and a s
expression had come over her face.

"I am dying mysel," she said to Miss Ca
"and I would fain see Isabel before I go. Ye
fear me now. I would like to tell her just t
reconciled in my mind. She has seen my sore
No, I'll say nothing to disturb her; I'm dying
as you may see."

"Hoot no, my bonnie woman! hoot no!" s
mother who supported her; "when the bonnie
comes, and you get your feet on the May go
Ye see, Miss Catherine, it's a' the grief and
she's had, and poor Ardnamore taken from us so
at the last."

But to Miss Catherine there was nothing
in the spectacle of the dauntless old woman sup
on her arm the dying creature who ought to ha
the support of her old age, and facing the world c
ously with her pathetic fictions to the last.
Janet was no champion-mother, but a worl
woman, bent upon elevating the social position
child. "I am not afraid of you, Ailie," sa
Catherine, "why should I be? Isabel, poor thi
her reason, though she's weak. Sit down, and
if she can see you. You are far from strong

"I am dying," said Ailie, softly, wit

which lit up her face. "Eh, and when I think upon Margaret! She will be *my* sister where I'm going. Tell Isabel that. Life has been a burden and a trouble, though I thought it was so good. Tell Isabel. It has been hard on her, too."

"Oh, how hard!" Miss Catherine said to herself, with an involuntary tear, as she went into the inner room. "Two young creatures, still so young, one overwhelmed in the conflict, and about to die and escape from it; the other fated, perhaps, to remain and live and bear the scars and the brand of it for years. Was it not well with Margaret, who, of all the penalties of living, had only death to bear? The old lady bent over Isabel in her bed, and kissed her forehead with unusual emotion. "Can you see Ailie, my dear?" she asked, and a little gleam of eagerness came into the sufferer's eyes. Miss Catherine ushered the visitors into the room, but would not stay to listen to the strange conversation that passed between them. It was not that she was wanting in curiosity, but that the pity of it was too much for even her strong nerves. She returned to the parlour with a flood of impatient tears coming to her eyes. They had been to blame. Ailie had married for—what? This severe judge said for ambition—a man incomprehensible to her, whom she did not, and could not love, and who sought her only in the madness of disappointment and grief. Such was the common-sense view of the matter; and the end was, as might have been expected, misery and despair. And Isabel; Isabel had done worse than Ailie. She had sinned against her womanhood—her dead husband, her living child. She had loved, she had taken her own way, and misery was the result. Miss Catherine, looking back into her own experience, could re-

member a time when she too had wanted her ow
and had given it up proudly, and sacrificed he
Was she the better for it? This long calm of
Isabel's brief fever—which was the least like tha
of joy and strength which the imagination cal
A few hot tears fell from her old eyes. It w
to pronounce any judgment, even now.

Ailie tottered to Isabel's bedside, supported
mother's arm. "Since you canna come to me,
come to you," she said. "Isabel, I've come to
I am reconciled in my mind. He sent me ov
before he died that *you* was no message from th
it was his own mad will, and no my God that
We've sinned, and we're punished; but His word
fast. Eh, but I'm content!"

"Oh, Ailie," said Isabel, looking wistfully f
bed, "I cannot follow what you say."

"Never mind, it will come back some time
Ailie; "and I'm come to bless you, Isabel Diar
was uplifted in my mind, and deceived mys
you, a simple lass, spoke the truth. Ye wer
when ye bid me not to wed, and ye were righ
ye bid me say farewell to him that came ba
mair. He perished with the sword, as I said; a
I'm going after him, and to Margaret. Marga
be *my* sister. O Isabel, rouse up in your mind
me a word to say to Margaret; I'm going to he

The tears came in a flood to Isabel's ey
this time they had burned with fever, neither sh
tears coming to refresh them. "O my Margare
cried; and then Jean interposed in terror, no
how great a relief to the patient's brain was t
burst of *tears*.

"She canna bear it," said Jean. "O Ailie, my woman, come away."

"Jean," said old Janet, fiercely turning upon her, "that's no a way to speak to Mrs. Diarmid of Ardnamore."

Thus the tragic and the trifling met together as everywhere. Ailie took no notice of either. She stooped over the bed, and kissed, as she had never done before, the face of the woman who had been so strangely connected with her life.

"I'll tell her a' you say," she cried; "I'll carry her a' the love in your heart; and the Lord bless you, Isabel. "You're no like her, and you're no like me, but the like of you is best for this life."

"O Ailie, my bonnie woman," cried Jean, unmoved by the mother's remonstrances, in the height of her own anxiety, "she canna bear it; come away!"

"Life's an awfu' riddle—an awfu' riddle," said Ailie, "and her and me we've guessed wrong; but the Lord will set a' right."

These were Ailie's last words so far as concerned the inmates of the Glebe. When she died, some time after, her death-bed ejaculations became the property of the parish, and were repeated far and wide, and finally made into a book. It was said that the power returned to her at the last, and that she prophesied and ended her existence in a blaze of spiritual triumph. These last utterances of exulting faith were heard by many, and could not be gainsaid. But this was the end and sum of her testimony so far as concerned Isabel and her own life.

CHAPTER XXVI.

ISABEL'S recovery was slow and tedious. The
both of body and mind, had been so great, a
spirit was so broken that it was often in doubt
the uncertain balance would be for death or lif
youth at length carried the day, and gradually,
without knowing it, her soul floated back to
which had, as it were, revolted her and dri
away. For days and weeks, when she was
able to speak, and when it was not even clear
power of thought had returned to her, she h
turning over and over in her mind all that had
her. And as soon as she was able to pay atte
external things, the after facts of which she h
ignorant had stolen in upon her—she could
tell how. No one had said to her in so man
that her husband was gone; but she knew it s
and all its details. He was gone, leaving no t
hind him. And it was for ever. Many a wil
was waged within her as she lay there silent
no sign. Should she have gone with him acco
her vows—for better, for *worse?* But could it be
that such a *worst* as this could ever have occ
any mind. And then love would rise up wi
cry and struggle. Perhaps it was well that
taken her so utterly at her word, and left no
which she could trace him;—and then life ca
by degrees, and the common round re-commenc
all things were as if Horace Stapylton had nev

The parish had waited, after the first flash o
was over, with patience scarcely to be looke

the explanation which might be expected on her recovery. And the little circle round her had specially cherished this hope, as was natural. Miss Catherine, in her higher degree, and Jean Campbell and her friends, waited with calm, knowing that the revelation must first be made to them. "Don't weary yourself, my dear," said the former. "I will wait your own time." But Isabel made no reply to this insinuated question. She ignored their wonder with a silent resolution which it was difficult to make any head against. "When you have anything to say to me, you know I am always at your service, Isabel," Miss Catherine added, a week after she had first signified her readiness to listen. "Thank you," Isabel had said, faintly; but she said nothing more. Then Jean made an attempt in her own way.

"My bonnie woman," said Jean, "eh, it's pleasant to see ye in your ain house again, as I never thought to see you! But you'll no bide? I canna expect it, I ken that. And, oh! how we'll miss you, the bairns and me."

"I mean to stay if you will let me," said Isabel, whose pale cheek always flushed when this subject was propounded. "Margaret and me."

"Let you!" cried Jean: "and dearly welcome. As if it wasna your own house and hers, the bonnie lamb! But it's mair than I could expect that you should stay."

Isabel made no answer. She treated Jean's artful address as a mere remark, and no question. Her face would be a shade sadder; her eye more languid all the evening after—but that was all.

Other gossips assailed her in a more open way. "I

hope the little Miss is thriving, and I hope
Stapylton was weel the last time you heard."
it's to America you're gaun; and, oh! I hope
excuse me—that your man will come for you;
leave you to make such a journey your lane.'
thinking he'll be away to prepare,"—one and
would say. And Isabel, with some hasty
vague reply, would make a rush at any su
conversation. She never mentioned his name; s
alluded to him—nor to her brief life with him
their parting. She spoke of everything aroun
if she had never left the Glebe; she resumed
old avocations. It had been in December th
married; and February had just begun when s
"home" in her misery. Of that interval she
notice, and of her husband said never a wor
was called by his name—that was all; and w
one addressed her by it suddenly, she had b
to shudder. But not a word of explanation ca
Isabel's lips. The time of her absence was
had not been.

And, perhaps, of all the eager, curious peop
her, the one most difficult to silence was the
who had taken to coming across the braes every
while Isabel was so ill, and now found it dif
give up the habit. He would sit opposite to
the little parlour while the spring evening leng
and watch her words and her looks with an in
which he could not restrain. "It's like old t
have ye back," the Dominie would say; and
smile would be Isabel's answer. She was al
work now—reading much—trying to teach
*variety of new accomplish*ments, labouring a

different pursuits with a pathetic earnestness that went to her visitor's heart.

"What do you want with all these books?" he said, as he sat at the parlour window looking out upon the darkling loch.

"To learn," she said. They were some of the minister's old Italian books, of which he had been so fond.

"To learn!—what for? It's an accomplishment will be of little use to you," said the Dominie; "unless it is *there* you are going when you leave here."

"It is for Margaret," said Isabel, with a quivering lip—"I would like her to learn when she is old enough what her father knew."

"Ah, that's a good thought," said the Dominie, taken by surprise; and then he added, "But you cannot give your life to little Margaret—nor carry such things about with you through the world."

"I will have time enough here," she said, under her breath.

"But, my dear!—we cannot expect you will be here all your life—that would be good for us, but ill for you."

"And why should it be ill for me?"

"Isabel! I must go back to your old name," said the Dominie; "I cannot call you by that lad's name. Are you another man's wife, or are ye no?"

And then the self-sustained creature, who had resisted so many attempts to penetrate her secret, fell into a passion of sudden tears.

"I am his wife," she cried, "but I will never see him again. Call me Isabel, or call me by my good man's name; and ask me no more."

Strong as the Dominie's curiosity was, h
not persist in face of this appeal and of t
which accompanied it; but he carried the news
Catherine, who day by day became more p
and more anxious to know the real state of
His partial success inspired the old lady. N
she went up to the Glebe, determined to s
mercy.

"Isabel," she said, solemnly, "it's time,
own sake, that your friends should know. I
speaking of the world. You may keep silence
please for them that's outside, but your friend
know. I saw ye married with my own eyes
could be nothing wrong about that?"

"There was nothing wrong," said Isabel.

"Then, my dear, tell us—tell me—what *is*
Has he gone to America, as they all say?"

"So far as I know," was the answer, sp
low that the inquisitor could scarcely hear.

"And do you mean to go after him, Isabel

A shudder ran through her frame. "Oh n
nevermore!" she cried, hiding her face in he
If it was longing or loathing, Miss Catherine c
tell, but she thought it was the former. Wha
is, she is fond of him still, was what she said
heart.

"Is not that giving up your duty?" Miss
rine continued, pitiless. "Isabel, there is no l
between him and me; but I could not counse
abandon your duty for all that."

"Oh, ask me no more questions," cried
with *a gesture of despair*; and that was

could be torn from her whatever any one might say.

When she was well enough to go so far, she made a secret pilgrimage to her husband's grave. The whole parish knew of it before the week was out, and drew its conclusions; but nobody suspected why it was that she sat so long, wrapt in musing and solitude, in that spot where the minister and Margaret slept side by side. "God grant her her wits, puir thing!" said one of the village gossips. "There she sat among the grass; and every bit weed that caught her eye, and the moss on the tombstone, all cleared away. You would have said it was a gardener in a garden at his work." Some thought it was penitence for her sin against him, and some that it was a compunctious regret for her "good man." Nobody knew that Isabel had buried in her husband's grave something more than her grief and remorse for her infidelity—another token more awful than anything so trifling could be supposed to be. She worked at it unseen with her slender, trembling fingers, making a place for it deep under the sod, and there hid the innocent present of her first affection—the little brooch, which had been plucked from the dead man—the fatal sign which had made her existence a desolation, and rent asunder her heart and her life.

And common life crept up round her, like the rising tide on the beach, and set her softly afloat in the old habits, the old routine, the current of the past. Little Margaret rose once more to be the chief object, and occupation, and interest of the quiet days. There was a long struggle with her own heart and her fate, and all the thousand suggestions which besiege a living

soul in an uncertain position. Her thoughts
wishes dragged her one way, and dragged her
way, and tore her like wild beasts out of th
But yet that anchor of necessity was good, an
her from some evils. And her child grew, and
crept round her, and moved her into the familia
Within the first year there came a claim upon
which her lawyer informed Isabel, and whic
out through the district after a while by those
channels which make everybody's secrets kn
was a bill drawn upon her from a far distan
of America, which she paid without hesitation,
it cost her many sacrifices. The same thing
peated several times within the course of
years; and then there came a letter to her, in a
handwriting——

No one had mentioned her legal name fo
time before that. She saw only those who ca
Isabel. But after the coming of this letter, it h
to her by chance to encounter the old Lair
Catherine's brother, come upon a rare visit to
country. "So this is Isabel," he said to her
patting her head as if she had been but still
"Mrs. ——, Mrs. ——, I forget the name."

"Lothian," she said, distinctly, before the
as was afterwards remembered. And from t
was called by her old name.

And little Margaret lived and grew. A
cannot be utterly wretched, whatever traged
have happened in her life, so long as she h
man-child to make her live anew. She was eve
in her way, developing into a hundred gracio
of *being, which Stapylton's* wife could n

known; and had her life after life was over, like the most of us—the one, an existence brief and full with sorrow and joy in it, and a crowd of events; the other, long, tranquil, with no facts at all to speak of, marking the passage of the years—nothing to tell: but yet, perhaps, the life that bulks most largely in the records in the skies.

THE END.

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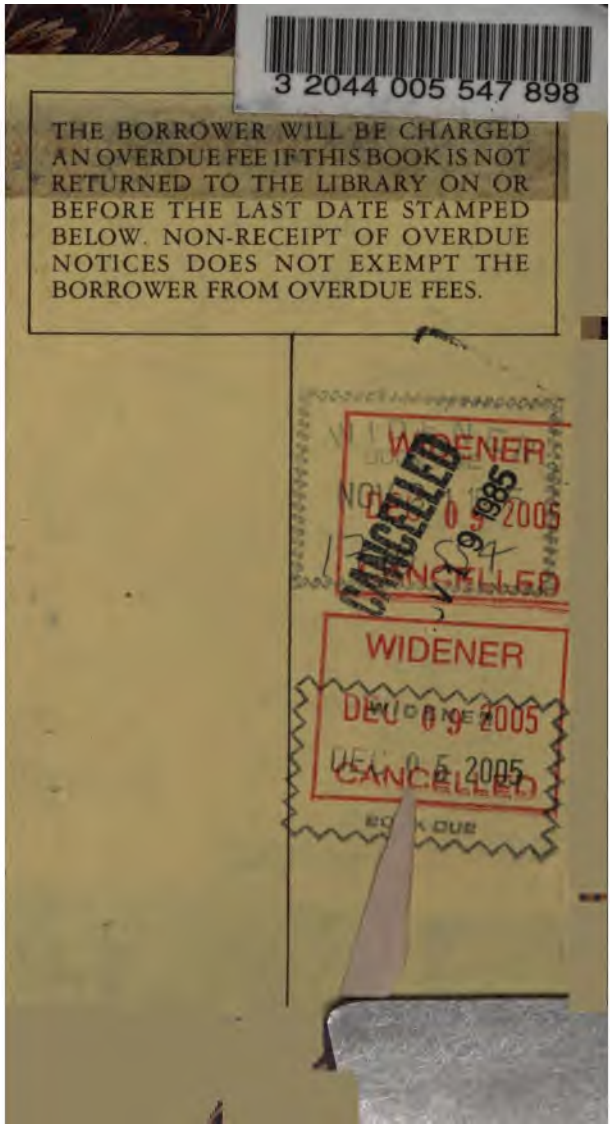
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